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# REINVENTIONS

FOUR PLAYS by OSCAR MANDEL

*after* Homer, Cervantes, Calderón and Marivaux



A Spectrum Productions Book

# **Reinventions**

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# REINVENTIONS

Four Plays by Oscar Mandel

After Homer, Cervantes, Calderón and Marivaux



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## Presentation

The four plays in the present collection were inspired by stories scattered in Homer and Virgil, Cervantes' *La Numancia*, Calderón de la Barca's *La Vida es sueño* and Marivaux's *La Double inconstance*. I have said something about each of these derivations in the separate forewords to the plays. It will be understood, I hope, that we who steal ideas for our plays from other artists' works do not blush, when the question of originality comes up, in the presence of those who invent, or believe they invent, their own plots. The point is worth making, I think, because this practice of re-creation is not quite so common today as it once was (the Greek tragedians did little else). So is another point, namely that works of art based on other works of art are as likely as the latter to be in ardent touch with "raw reality". There need be nothing bookish about them.

My principal characters all stand high in social rank. They are kings, princes, statesmen and generals—persons in command. That too is something we see little of these days. I am partial to staging characters of this class because what they do and suffer is usually (I do not say always) more *consequential* than what Jack and Jill do or have done to them. I mean of consequence to many people: the group, the tribe, the nation, the world. This gives the plays in which they live and die a quality of amplitude which is much harder to come by when the troubles of "just plain folk" are depicted.

Furthermore, I stray from the well-worn path in treating these eminent characters without condescension. When eminent characters happen to appear in the plays of living writers and those of the recent past, they usually do so reduced to physical and psychological tatters. Kings crawl on the floor, cardinals squat on kitchen chairs, dukes display holes in their breeches. Directors join in by turning the heroes and heroines of our classic texts into pathetic lumps. My own protagonists look and behave in accordance with their rank in the social pecking order.

And some of them are even virtuous: another decided deviation from the norm. It is my boast that I have the singular courage to discover some goodness not only in my humble characters but also in my kings, princes, statesmen and generals. In my opinion, debunking has become too easy, too predictable, downright automatic. Readers and audiences expect the tatters I have just mentioned to be moral in addition to physical, so that

the sorry picture will be complete. I have taken the more difficult road: up rather than down. Hard work, because let the serious reader be reassured. I do not write lyrics for musical comedies. The virtues I uncover are wrestled for; I know I must make them convincing to hardened cynics.

War and revolution rage at the heart of all three of the tragic or quasi-tragic texts I am presenting here. Six other plays of mine (published elsewhere) revolve around wars. No one who has made it alive out of the furnaces of the twentieth century will be surprised, nor does it appear that this subject will any time soon be considered romantically quaint.

Finally a word about the settings of these four plays: history, pseudo-history, quasi-history, legend, fantasy.... Needless to say, perfectly modern and perennial matters can be dramatized by stories of this kind; yet if such is the author's purpose, why not simplify and speak out by way of contemporary settings and characters? Why a war in ancient Iberia instead of a recent one, with the up-to-date weaponry and slang that everybody is familiar with, even if the war happens to be over? Let me answer indirectly. The day the first naturalist plays appeared, namely in the late nineteenth century, reactions against them rushed into view from all sides. Verse drama, pataphysical plays, folk plays, surrealism, allegory, fables, costume drama of every kind—no end of “poetic” alternatives got themselves launched against prosaic realism; and my plays, whether exciting or insipid, obviously take their place within that world of the high imagination. And yet, alternatives need not be antagonists. For us who write strongly imaginative plays, an analogy with the worlds of music and dance may be suggestive. Clearly these two arts respond to a deeply human capacity and desire to invent and rejoice in sounds other than ordinary noises and movements other than ordinary walking and running. By the same token, strongly “poetic” literature responds to our capacity and desire to invent and rejoice in a multitude of things we do not see and hear in our narrow vicinities. But of course, music does not kill off speaking, nor does dancing replace walking. Similarly, poetic drama—drama of the high imagination—lives side by side with mimetic realism. Lives and lets live. And caters not to a separate audience, but to the self-same one that wants images of itself one day, and flights to fancied realms the next, provided they too speak of his joys and his sorrows, his life and his death.

Los Angeles, 2002

# Sigismund, Prince of Poland

*A baroque entertainment in seven scenes*

¡Válgame Dios!  
qué de cosas hé soñado!

Calderón de la Barca, *La Vida es sueño*

## Foreword

The notion of “doing something” with Calderón’s *La Vida es sueño* is one I entertained for many years before writing the present play. It seems that I wanted more, somehow, than what the poet himself had produced out of his haunting central images of the terrible omen, the prince chained in a cave and the noble stratagem of the dream with its grim consequences. In truth, I longed for more of the Segismundo matter, less of the Clotaldo-Violante-Rosaura-Astolfo-Estrella romances, and much less of the *gracioso* Clarín—less tinsel, as I would call these portions of the Spanish play if I dared. When at last an overarching theme suggested itself to me, a master idea which was, to be sure, completely alien to Calderón’s, I was able, step by step, to extract a new play from the Spanish classic.

Among the many things that changed, in this newborn dramatic tale the pseudo-dream of the original became a genuine dream, with a dream within the dream for good measure; as it has happened to all of us that we have dreamed that we had a dream. Nevertheless, everyone who has read *La Vida es sueño* will recognize not only my underlying indebtedness to it, but also a number of playful near-quotations from it. On the other hand, the reader unfamiliar with the parent-play need not run to the library in order to make sense of mine.

A trifle more mindful of Polish history than Calderón, I made free and fanciful use of Norman Davies’ excellent *God’s Playground: a History of Poland*. The name of Bogdan Opalinski combines those of Bogdan Chmielnicki, the ferocious warlord, Cossack leader and scourge of Poland, with Krzysztof Opalinski, the liberal and enlightened author of certain admired *Satires and Warnings* which I have not read.

For Hecataeus, whose works are conveniently lost, I went to Herodotus, Book Two.

Late in the play, Sigismund quotes somewhat freely from *Coriolanus*, and later from an anonymous seventeenth-century English lyric, followed by a modified section of Andrew Marvell’s Horatian Ode on Cromwell. The reader is asked to suppose that Sigismund is reciting some fine Polish verse which I have translated into English.

Szopen is Polish for Chopin, but no slur upon the great man is intended.

## Characters

King Bazylic of Poland.

Prince Sigismund, *his son*.

Prince Astolof of Muscovy (*played by two actors*).

Princess Estrella Jagiello.

Count Bogdan Opalinski.

Szymon Klotalski, *castellan of Zakopane*.

Zbigniew of Bialistok, *royal astrologer*.

Florian Radziwill, *crown chancellor*.

Vladimir, *master of the royal household*.

Ladislaw Szopen, *court musician*.

Agafya Matveyevna Kulkova, *a Muscovite farmgirl*.

Layla, *a mute Turkish slave*.

Father Radim.

Convicts, soldiers, corpses, servants and attendants.

## SCENE ONE: KING BAZYLIC

*(Night. A cabinet in the royal palace on Wawel Hill in Cracow. King Bazylic is alone)*

KING. As many calamities swarm over the land as worms crawling in a carcass. All over Poland the peasants are rioting in the villages instead of harvesting the fields. They pretend they're poor and hungry. But if they're so hungry, where do they get the muscle to pitch rocks at their masters and overturn the haycarts? A good fifty of my best gentlemen have been murdered so far trying to put down the insolent clowns—trained warriors all of them, men I needed to face the infidel Turks in Hungary who, besides rebaptizing the Hungarians into Mohammedans, are keeping me out of the gold mines I was counting on to buy off the Swedish army of Lutheran heathens that's pouring out of Livonia. To save my country I've thought more than once of converting to Islam in order to yoke up with the Turks against the Swedes, or turning Lutheran in order to go partners with the Swedes against the Turks. And my soul be damned for the greater good of my people. Oh, the chroniclers will shudder when they come to me. But all these troubles are like appetizers to the real horror. After twenty-two years of trying, my Basilea finally produces a baby, and dies on me in childbirth in spite of a gang of physicians, surgeons, astrologers, midwives and the Bishop of Gniezno attending her. No sooner has my Sigismund let out his first yell than the sky breaks out in unheard-of depredations and conflagrations. Poland is shaken by dreadful earthquakes, steeples cave in on worshippers, rivers reverse their course, the flowers wilt in unison, donkeys beget calves and fish are seen walking on the roads, and I myself will probably go insane before I hear the next piece of bad news. However, in order to leave no stone unturned, I've summoned my chief astrologer—and here, speak of the devil, he comes.

*(Enter Zbigniew)*

KING. Welcome Zbigniew. Report to me. Spare me no horror. I'm a military man.



ZBIGNIEW. Learned King Bazylic, protector of Poland and mankind, the steeple of the cathedral of Tarnow has just caved in on a crowd of worshippers who were mourning the caving in of the steeple of the cathedral of Lwow, and young Sigismund, God bless him, bit off a nipple belonging to the Countess Matilda, his wet-nurse.

KING. And only twelve days old! I'm petrified. Something ghastly that I haven't yet enumerated is advancing on our land. What do your conjunctions and disjunctions say?

ZBIGNIEW. I tremble, your majesty.

KING. I'm ready for the worst. Poland is sinking into the Baltic or sliding under the Carpathians.

ZBIGNIEW. O anguish!

KING. I am going to be deposed.

ZBIGNIEW. Woe, woe!

KING. Murdered.

ZBIGNIEW. Horrid! Fiery comets criss-cross the welkin, blood drips from Saturn, a new constellation appears in the shape of a dragon—

KING. Nothing but allegories! Tell me in plain Polish!

ZBIGNIEW. Your majesty, fearful portents clamor in the sky, I descry an alphabet of poisonous planets, and all that remains is for me, Zbigniew of Bialistok, to interpret the tragic text, though doing so may cost me my head.

KING. I think I'll sit down first.

ZBIGNIEW. "Rising Sigismund shall torment Poland with justified plunder, virtuous rapine and noble massacre. Moles shall grow wings. Eagles shall burrow in ditches. And Sigismund will force the King of Poland into the dust."

KING. What? What's that? What's this gibberish?

ZBIGNIEW. No gibberish, your majesty, but a true quotation of the stars, which are as legible to me as a page of the Gospel is to our bishop.

KING. Repeat before I start tearing up the tapestries.

ZBIGNIEW. Reluctantly, your highness. "Rising Sigismund shall torment Poland with justified plunder, virtuous rapine and noble massacre. Moles shall grow wings. Eagles shall burrow in ditches. And Sigismund will force the King of Poland into the dust." Forgive me, my lord, but these are the very—

KING. Shut your mouth! This has to refer to some Sigismund two thousand years from now. It's nothing to me.

ZBIGNIEW. And the earthquakes? And the steeples? And the peasants? And the heathens on all sides? No, my lord, shun illusion, I implore you, shun illusion.

KING. You're right. I'll rebaptize the little monkey. Who needs a Sigismund? It was my wife's idea. My last words to my poor Basilea, before she slipped away, were "Damn it, every second prince of Europe seems to be called Sigismund nowadays!" I must have had a premonition. All right. I'll call him Jesus if necessary!

ZBIGNIEW. Oh my lord, shun illusion! Heaven dislikes equivocation. God does not stand upon names.

KING. You're right again. I'm deluding myself. I must act neat and direct. I'll do away with the wicked child. I'm sorry, but that is clearly what heaven is asking of me. "Rising Sigismund." In other words, do not let him rise. And *then* let him try to force me into the dust with his just massacres! Call Captain Teczinski.

ZBIGNIEW (*throwing himself at the king's feet*). God forbid, your highness! And God forbids. Heaven cannot want a crime. It would unheaven itself if it did. Already—allow me the liberty, my lord—already the Pope excommunicated you for—for what you did to your predecessor on the throne. You emptied the treasury for the benefit of the Pontiff's nieces and nephews till he retracted and you were able to hear mass again, thank God! But now will you infuriate him again?

KING. Is it kind of you to remind me? Oh my sins, my sins! I've endowed more than my share of churches, abbeys, convents, hospitals, but my sins still give me nightmares. My soul is a cesspool.

ZBIGNIEW. Imagine killing the helpless baby.

KING (*weeping*). My little Sigismund! What shall I do?

ZBIGNIEW. Think of your immortal soul.

KING. Yes, but I must think of Poland too. Virtuous plunder, justified massacre— isn't that what you said? I don't even understand what it means. I hate enigmas.

ZBIGNIEW. I too read without quite understanding.

KING. What shall I do? What shall I do? (*Thunder and lightning*) What now? Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners.... Kneel, Zbigniew.... (*Both sink to their knees. More thunder and lightning*) It's

*Sigismund, Prince of Poland*

coming from the mountains.... It's looking for me.... Mary, Mother of God.... *(They pray. More thunder)*.... Wait! The mountains!... The wild mountains.... Zbigniew, listen to me.... *(More thunder)*

## SCENE TWO: PRINCE SIGISMUND

*(Twenty-one years later. Early evening, which will gradually darken. A cleared area in front of a mountain cave, surrounded by forest. A rustic table and benches. Books piled on the table. A crucifix nailed to a tree. Also visible is the cabin—or part of it—housing Layla. After a while, we hear a clanking noise, and then Sigismund appears, one end of a long chain clamped to one of his ankles. He blinks through the trees at the setting sun)*

SIGISMUND. Wretched Sigismund! Unhappy creature! Tell me, heaven, what crime have I committed to be so harshly treated? Some learned men assert that to be born is crime enough for any punishment, but if this be true, it is a crime of which all living men and women are guilty, and yet I am punished far worse than any of them. What other offense is on my head? Why are others happy while I am shackled to this cave? The graceful bird, no sooner is it born than it cuts through the air in a flower of feathers, leaving the nest's peaceful security. Yet I, whose soul is so much greater, enjoy less liberty. The four-legged beast, no sooner is it born than it leaves its lair and ranges cruelly in the wild to feed itself. Yet I, whose instincts are more virtuous, enjoy less liberty. The silvery fish, spawned by ooze and weeds, no sooner is it born than it navigates the cold stream like a skiff lovely in the waves. Yet I, whose will is free, enjoy less liberty. That stream itself, no sooner is it born on the snowy peak than it uncoils itself to snake across the meadows, rushing merrily among the poppies of the field. Yet I, possessed of much more life, enjoy less liberty! Thoughts such as these are scorching lava, and I their volcano of anger. Sometimes I want to die. Often I want to kill. Where is justice? Why should a man suffer when bird, beast, fish and river rejoice?

So much for my twilight clamor. Damned chain. Next week Klotalski will be shifting it to my other ankle. But right now I'm hungry. Layla! Where are you? Layla! *(He does gymnastic exercises and calls out in rhythm)* Dinner! Layla! Dinner! Layla! Dinner! Of

*Sigismund, Prince of Poland*

course she's mute and can't answer, but this way I exercise my lungs too. Some day, somehow I will be shouting commands to multitudes somehow. (*More gymnastics*) Layla! Lovely! Layla! Lovely! And that's no joke. Granted that she's the only woman I have ever seen other than woodcuts in my books, and she's rather older than I must be, but I'm no fool, I know that round is beautiful, the ancients already knew it, and O crucified Jesus forgive me for dwelling on things of the flesh more than a Christian should, but is she ever lively on my miserable cot, and does she ever cook a luscious meal! Layla! Ah—it's about time.

*(Enter the generously endowed Layla, carrying Sigismund's dinner. She will, of course, be responding with sounds and gestures throughout the action)*

SIGISMUND. Show me what you've brought. Good.... Good.... And what is this? Layla! You wade into the woods picking God knows what and trying new edibles on me. One of these days, you slave, Turk and enemy of Christ.... I'm joking, my girl! You're no Medea, thank God, and I like *everything* you do. Give Sigismund a kiss. Have you eaten? Not going hungry? Good. Go in and prepare something for Klotalski. I think I can hear him coming—unless it's a bear cracking the branches out there. (*Layla returns to her cabin*) As I hope to be saved, I'll have her baptized and marry her the day after I've rid myself of this accursed chain. (*He eats his dinner*)

*(Enter Klotalski)*

KLOTALSKI. Good evening, young man! And how are we today?

SIGISMUND. Ask me *what* are we today. We are a prisoner, Klotalski, a wretch worse off than a caged gorilla and you know it.

KLOTALSKI. Nonsense! You're in the pink—what am I saying?—in the purple of health, your muscles bulging like two of our Polish potatoes, and I hope you've studied your Hecataeus.

SIGISMUND. I like ancient history, Klotalski, but live history is more exciting. What's the news at court, eh? Did the crown assessor stop at Zakopane? Did you see him? Tell me all.

KLOTALSKI. Gently! He did stop on his way as promised, and he did call on me with late news, or gossip. It appears that Prince Astolof has arrived from Muscovy in a cloud of overripe Russian perfume in order to endear himself to Princess Estrella.

SIGISMUND. A toyshop prince! Will she marry him?

KLOTALSKI. According to the assessor, everyone hopes so. Better to have Muscovy on our side than see them helping the Tatars and Turks against us.

SIGISMUND. I could bash Tatars and Turks better than any Astolof if the king would only let me.

KLOTALSKI. Let me hear you repeat your lesson instead.

SIGISMUND. Wait. Is Opalinski still murdering landowners left and right?

KLOTALSKI (*sullen*). I don't know.

SIGISMUND. Good for him! Good for the bandit! Away with oppressors! Oppressors like yourself, Klotalski. No more chains!

KLOTALSKI. I think you're asking for the whip, my son.

SIGISMUND. Who am I, Klotalski? Surely a prince too? I stare for hours at the king's portrait you hung in my cave and tell it aloud I'm his son, the gypsies stole me from the cradle, or maybe you did in order to betray the king, old ruffian, and I'll twist your head off the day I find out.

KLOTALSKI. Hothead! The whip is too good for you. I don't know who you are, but I'm guessing that you're the bastard of some Hebrew ragpicker. That is why I placed the king's portrait where it is, between Saint Stanislas and the Holy Virgin, for you to abase yourself before him and them, not for impudent observations. Enough of that! I'm ordered to keep you alive and I do my duty without asking questions. Did you study your Hecataeus today, yes or no?

SIGISMUND. What else is there for me to do? Marry Princess Estrella? (*Klotalski makes a menacing gesture*) Peace. I'll recite. Book Fourteen. "The night King Mycerinus received the Ethiopian ambassadors, he gave a banquet unmatched for splendor since the days of King Sesostris. A thousand dancing-girls"—

(*Enter Layla with another dish*)

KLOTALSKI. Good evening, resplendent Layla! Ah, our fresh Carpathian berries in cream! What a treat! Continue, my dear Sigismund. And some music from you, Layla.

*(Exit Layla; she returns holding a lute, on which she plucks a Turkish folk tune as best she can)*

SIGISMUND *(eating)*. "A thousand dancing-girls, an orchestra consisting of innumerable harps, trumpets, oboes, and percussion instruments, and a feast which lasted from evening to dawn, with a different wine brought in for each course, and a mouthwash of Karkemish brandy for every guest. When the ambassadors expressed their amazement as the sun was rising—for they had eaten and drunk with the utmost care and kept their heads clear—"

KLOTALSKI. Make a particular note of that, Sigismund. Keep their heads clear. Incorruptible statesmen.

SIGISMUND. Do you believe it?

KLOTALSKI. I don't know that I do, but the idea of it is wonderful, the moral idea in the historian's mind, and that is what finally matters. Go on.

SIGISMUND. Let me see. "When the ambassadors and so forth, King Mycerinus spoke as follows: 'All this luxury, my lords, this pomp, this magnificence, all this is but gloss. When you return to the emperor of Ethiopia report only, I beg you, that in this fair Egypt of mine all men are equal'—"

KLOTALSKI. What's that?

SIGISMUND. What do you mean, what's that?

KLOTALSKI. Is that in Hecataeus?

SIGISMUND. Where else, for God's sake? Do I have it from Layla?

KLOTALSKI. Layla, go away! *(Exit Layla)* Let me hear the rest.

SIGISMUND. " 'No one is richer than his neighbor, we wage no wars, no man lords it over another, our kings are elected by universal suffrage male and female, and I myself, as soon as my successor is chosen, intend to return to the company of dancers in which I toured Egypt every winter before I was crowned pharaoh.' When the ambassadors, having returned to Ethiopia, recounted to the emperor the wonders they had seen and heard in Egypt, he said to them

'Gentlemen, you must have been cleverly drugged at that banquet of yours, and then you dreamed all these wonders and extravagances.' But they loudly denied it and affirmed it had all happened as they reported." That's as far as I memorized, because Father Radim came up for confession, my Latin lesson and a bit of cold chicken. But, says he, Hecataeus is even grander than Isaiah, his favorite, and you're no fool for making me study him. Good man! If I were king, I'd make him come true in Poland. No more chains!

KLOTALSKI. Let me see the book. I must be going senile.

SIGISMUND. Here. I kept a chicken-bone where I left off.

*(Klotalski examines the passage)*

KLOTALSKI. Hm. You really memorized it. The truth is that it's ages since I read Hecataeus at the university, and read him, of course, in the original Greek. There's some treason in this Polish translation. As for Father Radim, never mind; I'll have a chat with him before next Sunday. But kindly remember that Hecataeus is reporting an extravagant dream, and besides, the Egyptians were infidel barbarians. A king is a king, don't ever forget it, the poor are poor, nobody elected God and nobody except the aristocracy is going to elect the King of Poland and nobody is about to fill a peasant's pocket with zlotys so he can drink himself into a stupor when he should be busy in the fields.

SIGISMUND. Why are we getting all hot under the collar, old man? What are Egypt or Poland to me? I'm chained, remember. Damn damn damn.

KLOTALSKI. Well, that doesn't prevent you from being as smart as any bachelor of arts I've ever met. Bless my soul—the way you memorize!

SIGISMUND. Klotalski!

KLOTALSKI. Yes my boy?

SIGISMUND. I'm sure you are a man of tremendous consequence in the kingdom. A governor, a senator—maybe you're my father.

KLOTALSKI. God forbid! I was never married.

SIGISMUND. Tell me tell me who I am, tell me!

KLOTALSKI. Again! I can't! I don't know! I'm the Castellan of Zakopane, a penniless noble in a leaking castle who was never told a



thing other than to obey orders.

SIGISMUND. It's a lie! I'll murder you!

KLOTALSKI. And then what? My soldiers will throw you into a vat of boiling oil.

SIGISMUND. Let them try! But why am I chained for life, I only, only I, worse than a bird, a beast, a fish, a river?

KLOTALSKI. I have told you a million times! A divine voice was heard at your birth, prophesying that, whoever you were, a peasant's brat or whatever, I don't know, you would inflict torrents of tears, unspeakable terror and merciless carnage on the land. Even—I shudder as I speak the words—even trample the king to the ground. Many wanted to snuff your life out in the cradle, but pity prevailed and you were carried to these mountains, chained to the rock, and placed under my care. The end.

SIGISMUND. Vile oppression! I was innocent! A baby! But not a peasant's brat! I know what I am, Klotalski. And because of you I've become the monster you were afraid I'd be.

KLOTALSKI. So you see, they were right.

SIGISMUND. No! They were wrong! That voice was not divine, it came from hell, it tempted you and you fell! Hack this chain off my ankle!

*(Trumpet sound nearby)*

SOLDIER *(off-stage)*. Lord Klotalski!

KLOTALSKI. Sounds like ensign Kristof. I'm here! What is it?

*(Enter a soldier pushing Agafya, bound, ahead of him. She is coarsely dressed and limps a little. Layla enters, looks on, and after a while begins to light torches for the night)*

SIGISMUND. A woman!

KLOTALSKI. Who is this? What happened?

AGAFYA. This ruffian—

SOLDIER. I'll do the talking, miss!

SIGISMUND *(to Layla)*. She's so thin!

KLOTALSKI. Silence everybody!

SOLDIER. Here's her dagger.

KLOTALSKI (*to Layla*). Take him into the cave! At once!

SIGISMUND. I refuse.

KLOTALSKI. You refuse and I'll have you whipped.

SIGISMUND. And I'll break your neck before I let you.

SOLDIER (*aside to Klotalski*). Don't worry, sir; she don't know a thing.

SIGISMUND (*to Agafya*). Lady, if you are a victim too, like myself—

AGAFYA. I am! And now twice!

SIGISMUND. Good. Be patient. One of these days—

KLOTALSKI. Silence, *convict*! I am interrogating the girl.

SIGISMUND. Interrogate but don't harm her! (*To Agafya*) Do you see these chains?

AGAFYA. I see and I am amazed. Are you under a magic spell? Where am I?

KLOTALSKI. In your grave if you say a single wrong word. Who are you, woman? You sound and look foreign. What brings you snooping into these parts?

AGAFYA. What snooping? I fell from my horse!

SOLDIER. That she did, sir. We witnessed it.

AGAFYA. Coming down a rough slope. Bialik which is my mare went flying over a rock like one of them winged horses in story-books. I almost died. And then half a dozen armed roughnecks grabbed and tied my wrists instead helping a lady saddle up again.

KLOTALSKI. To the point. Who and what are you?

AGAFYA. I'm no spy at any rate. My name is Agafya Matveyevna Kulkova and I'm a Russian farmgirl. I've got manners, I can read, and I'm travelling from the Kingdom of Muscovy to Cracow on pure unadulterated private business, nothing to do with spying nor convicts nor state secrets. So please my lord, let me find my Bialik again and be on my way. I'm not putting any questions to you about what I seen here, I always say there's a reason for everything no matter how weird, and since I can tell that you're some fancy diplomat who doesn't like strangers meddling with his business, and I don't blame you a bit for *that*, you can count on me to keep my thoughts locked up in the barn up here if you tell your brutes to untie me and let me go.

SIGISMUND. Have you never heard anything about me, Agafya?

About poor Sigismund?

AGAFYA. No sir, but I can see that we're both oppressed victims. You're chained and I'm bound. That's clear enough.

KLOTALSKI. You talk a great deal, my girl. Instead of gabbing about matters that don't concern you, tell me more about your pure unadulterated private business.

AGAFYA. It's about my maidenly honor, sir. Somebody went and besmirched it. I realize I ain't the first girl it ever happened to, but all the same I want restitution and compensation and I'm out to get it with my dad's consent.

KLOTALSKI. All the way to Cracow?

AGAFYA. All the way to Cracow. And for good reason.

KLOTALSKI. For *very* good reason, I'd guess—to come riding this far. I take it that your honor was whatever it was by some fine gentleman.

AGAFYA (*laughing*). Bull's eye! They don't come no finer!

KLOTALSKI. I'm going to take another guess. A fine gentleman in the retinue of Prince Astolof.

AGAFYA (*laughing harder*). Retinue! Oh, I like that! Retinue!

SIGISMUND. Maybe she doesn't know what the word means.

AGAFYA. I do know what the word means, I'm nobody's village idiot. Hang me if I'm not itching to tell you about Lord Retinue! Maybe you could even help me—so as to pay up for scaring me. Fair is fair.

KLOTALSKI. I wonder if the girl is a little crazy.

AGAFYA (*suddenly serious*). Yes, she is. Crazy about Prince Astolof. And him about me. Ha! That gave you a jolt, I see.

SIGISMUND. I believe her!

KLOTALSKI. Silence! Girl, how dare you make such an accusation?

AGAFYA. He did it and I'm going after him. I don't care what you think about it provided you give me back my horse and let me go on to Cracow.

SIGISMUND. Make him marry you!

AGAFYA (*laughing*). Good idea! Or else give me to some fine boyar at least! Lord, my blood boils when I think of it—not so much as a ring, not so much as a flower, nothin'! “How dare you?” says he next day when I caught hold of him riding through the barley-field. “It was a dream,” he says with a fat laugh; “your sweetheart mixed powders

into your drink afore doing it to you and made you dream he was a prince or a king." Well, let's see who he thinks is dreaming this time when I surprise him in his Cracow palace!

SIGISMUND. Jump out at him while he's courting the princess!

KLOTALSKI (*who has been in a deep study*). Silence I say.... Listen, Agafya; your story does sound true to me. At least it sounds *possibly* true. True enough for me to take you to Cracow in my own retinue this very week, and I'll even see if can't get you presented to King Bazylic.

AGAFYA. Will you, will you really?

SIGISMUND. Congratulations, Klotalski, congratulations for once!

AGAFYA. I'll be the most grateful girl in the world. I'll serve you as long as I live and I won't blab about nothing.

KLOTALSKI. I like you so much that I don't even care if you do blab! We Poles like spirited girls. (*To the soldier*) Untie her.

SOLDIER. Stand still, girl.

KLOTALSKI. Here's your dagger. And is that a purse hanging from your belt?

AGAFYA. Yes, my lord.

KLOTALSKI. Full of gold?

AGAFYA. Ha, ha, ha! I wish! But mind you—copper enough for a square meal when I'm hungry, which ain't often, we're tough in our village.

KLOTALSKI. Still, here's a gold piece for you. Tuck it in. It will help you get lodgings fit for a prince's love, and buy diapers for his heir if necessary.

AGAFYA. Don't worry; I can take a joke. And as I see you're giving me the gold piece with an honest heart, with an honest heart I'll accept it.

KLOTALSKI (*to the soldier*). Take her to the encampment, give her a bath, have the surgeon dress her foot, feed her and her horse, give her a bed, and treat her like a princess of Muscovy.

SOLDIER. You mean we're not allowed our turn to besmirch her honor?

AGAFYA. You try and I'll cut off your—

KLOTALSKI. You try and I'll honor a tree with your carcasses. And now get out of here both of you.

AGAFYA (*kneeling*). I kiss your feet, my lord.

KLOTALSKI. Good girl. Behave and I'll take good care of you.

AGAFYA. I promise. Back in the village—

KLOTALSKI. Blab, blab, blab! Get out!

AGAFYA. Yes, sir.

SOLDIER. Come along, spitfire. *(They leave)*

SIGISMUND. Poor girl! And she must be famished. Look at her and then look at Layla. Will you really take her to the king, Klotalski?

KLOTALSKI. I think I will.

SIGISMUND. What are you hiding from me? Are you close to the king?

KLOTALSKI. Again! I don't know him and he doesn't know me, except by reputation. But it came to me while the girl was rattling away that I might as well combine your quarterly business, a little lawsuit of my own, and her grievance, all in one expedition. The king is known as a tiger for justice. If the girl isn't lying, he will do something exceptional for her, if only to keep the prince from being embarrassed; and she—well, what can I say? She may be grateful to me....

SIGISMUND. I don't recognize you, Klotalski! Where's Hecataeus now?

KLOTALSKI. I'm a man, Sigismund—old, but still a man. You have your Layla, I have no one.

*(Layla is cleaning up, and will be returning to her cabin during the following speech)*

SIGISMUND. Ha, ha, ha, ha! Forward march! Enjoy the skinny thing! Look at my Layla grinning! Get along, you nauseous Turk. God only knows who was first to besmirch *your* honor! Ha, ha, ha! *(Suddenly serious)* Klotalski, you're lying to me, and don't imagine for a moment that I'm too stupid to understand there's a strange game being played with me—with me and around me. My ankle may be chained but my brain isn't. Godspeed to Cracow, old schemer. *(Church-bells in the distance)* Do you hear this? God sees through all of us, even the Klotalskis. Layla, come out and light his lordship to his horse. I'm going to bed.

*(He drags himself and his chain into the cave)*

KLOTALSKI. Let him believe in the strange game. He is pregnant with high fancies that suit me all of a sudden. To Cracow! The idea struck me so hard while the girl was talking that I almost staggered. Such an idea, round and succulent, must be squeezed of all its sap before it withers. This month Sigismund comes of age. Shall he die here sixty years hence and still in chains? I love the boy I was ordered to guard, but I love my worthy self too. What if I can exalt both Sigismund and myself? The rumors that he is alive have never been silenced. How could it be otherwise? True, the Household Guard is supremely loyal; each soldier is a Polish nobleman; but now and then a retired guardsman will take one drink too many and slurp out a hint. The opposition is ready to cry tyranny and infanticide. And what an opposition! Twenty years ago we had only a formless rabble of disgruntled peasants inspired by their German brothers. Today it's the peasants and the city riff-raff banded together, storing arms, clamoring for privileges and charters and representation and distribution, parading about in finery my own grandparents couldn't afford—well! just listen to that Muscovy peasant-girl! They've caught the fever on the steppes as well! Her *honor* has been besmirched, if you please! I didn't know whether I should laugh or weep. Tomorrow we'll have to address them as Mister and Madam. But I'm wandering off the track. Let the girl raise a hue and cry in Cracow against Astolof, and at the same time advertise at every street-corner what a wonder she saw in the mountains. Our Poles will know how to put two and two together. With Astolof looking either guilty or ridiculous, and discredited in any case, I'll beg the king to allow me to convey Sigismund to the palace as our acknowledged heir to the crown. And why not? Twenty-one years ago we were all terrified; I myself argued that the infant should be put to death; but those were the dark ages. Omens and prodigies have gone out of fashion. What omens? We have our brilliant Kopernik, bless us, the Bohemians over the mountains boast of their Klepper or Pekler, everybody is making himself cozy with the stars what with peering at them through those newfangled lenses—omens be damned, and the church never liked them anyway. "Your majesty," I'll say, "we need a young man at the head of our levies, a young, strong, handsome prince of our own blood, reborn from the dead, a

legend!—in short, a hero who can command enthusiasm—bully bodies we have plenty of, it's enthusiasm we lack—against Turks, Swedes, the mob and above all against that traitor to his kind, Bogdan Opalinski, who philosophizes by the book and kills by the pistol. Your place, sir, is in the palace, holding all the kingdom's strings in your fingers, while Sigismund, our awakened Polish eagle, proudly hunts down Bogdan the wolf." Leave it to me! I can always count on my eloquence! And I thank myself for having adorned the boy's mind with images of high policy and historic destiny even as I kept him dutifully humbled. So now for another turn of the wheel. Suddenly I appear as his liberator, his benefactor. And what follows? Whatever God intends. Old I may be, but I have vigor to spare for—we shall see what. Half-words are sometimes wisest even to oneself. Godspeed to Cracow! And you, my son, sleep in your cave and dream of the splendor you shall owe your Klotalski.....

*(Layla has appeared with a torch. They leave)*

### SCENE THREE: ASTOLOFO AND ESTRELLA

*(A long, sustained single note is heard on a violin. After that, the stage lights reveal a room in the royal palace of Cracow. Enter, one from the left and the other from the right, Prince Astolof and Princess Estrella)*

ASTOLOF. Princess Estrella, well named in that sweet Tuscan idiom which all men adore—for in that language *estrella* signifies star—or rather ill-named because only half-named, forasmuch as your eyes are twins and therefore well might you be called *Estrellas* or double star—Princess Estrella, then, or *Estrellas*, at your approach the trumpets and drums pummel and blow, likewise the birds and fountains greet you with amazement, the ones becoming fountains of joyful feathers, the others birds of soaring water. All welcome you: the drum because you banish night, the trumpet because you broadcast wisdom, the birds because you soar above all women, the fountains to signify the flow of your wit. But above all these, with ever-renewed worship, a prince kneels before you; I mean myself, so recently arrived from the bleaknesses of remote Muscovy to the jeweled enchantments of mighty Poland.

ESTRELLA. Prince Astolof, I humbly thank you. The elegance of your discourse suggests that Muscovy, far from being as bleak and remote as you indicate—I have not enjoyed the good fortune of journeying in an easterly direction—for, as perhaps you know, I descend on my mother's side from a *Spanish* line—

ASTOLOF. Of the purest Christian blood!

ESTRELLA. And therefore have travelled only thither—nevertheless, as I was saying, your delicate speech suggests a court deeply penetrated by the humanities, and alive to all the refinements of cultivated feeling. I shall never again credit the reports that your father the Tsar boils his prisoners alive.

ASTOLOF. Ah princess, every word you utter is a happy augury, namely for myself and you, and for our two nations. The great King Bazylic is childless, rumors to the contrary notwithstanding. You are



his undisputed heiress. I, on the other hand, rejoice in the title of young Caesar of Muscovy. Our union will secure eternal blessings to our twinned kingdoms, together we will pulverize the Turks and Swedes and alarm the Habsburgs; and I would turn into an estrella in the heavens at this very moment were I not preoccupied, I mournfully confess, by the tiny portrait of a man which hangs about your swannish neck and which I asked you in vain last night to unfold to me. Is it, as I hope, the resemblance of a deceased brother or a lamented cousin? Imagine, I implore you, a lover's chagrined jealousy—his tremulous apprehension!

ESTRELLA. Tsarevich, I have nothing to hide, and if the archbishop had not interrupted us last night—but here comes a yet nobler diversion, for I perceive that my uncle approaches.

*(Servants usher in King Bazylic, now white-bearded)*

ASTOLOF. Glorious monarch—

ESTRELLA. Dearest uncle—

ASTOLOF. Terror of the infidels—

ESTRELLA. Protector of orphans—

KING. Children and future rulers of united Poland, Lithuania and Muscovy—

ASTOLOF. Heavenly words!

KING. Let me embrace you both. Give me your hands. There. And now allow me to join them together. So.

ASTOLOF. I place my fervent lips on this angelic hand as though it were the wafer of the Holy Eucharist.

KING. Sit, my children, sit. This is a sweet moment after a troubled meeting with my councillors.

*(He claps his hands and servants bring refreshments)*

ESTRELLA. Will you confide in us, uncle, or must you keep your burden to yourself?

KING. Of course I will confide in you—you two who must be carrying that burden after I am gone.

ASTOLOF. God grant you a hundred more young years!

KING. God forbid.

ESTRELLA. Your burden, my dear?

KING. Alas, the heaviest part of it is due to that gentleman who hangs about your neck.

ASTOLOF. At last! Who is this rival of mine?

ESTRELLA. A penniless exile, prince, whom you need not fear. His name is Baron Bogdan Opalinski.

ASTOLOF. The great rebel! What are you telling me?

KING. The regrettable truth.

ASTOLOF. My mind totters.

ESTRELLA. I pledged myself to him, and he swore eternal love to me, on my innocent sixteenth birthday.

ASTOLOF. A glass of water!

KING. Compose yourself, prince. All will be well. The path is rocky where it begins but levels out at the end. Continue, my dear. Your honesty touches me.

ESTRELLA. Briefly, my lord: after reminding us that King Piast, the founder of our nation, was born a peasant, Bogdan renounced his birthright, freed eighty thousand serfs, gave them his lands, forsook the court and myself, and became—but this you already know—the leader of the voiceless, the oppressed—

KING. And the lawless.

ESTRELLA. Lawless indeed, since no law was ever made for them. However, Bogdan Opalinski is gone. The portrait is a vestige of my childhood. The woman, prince, will marry you.

KING. You see?

ASTOLOF. Dazed but unbowed, I take up the gauntlet. Destiny will not be undone by a miniature. Furthermore, I hope and trust that my ardent kisses and caresses—

ESTRELLA. Prince!

ASTOLOF. I insist: my ardent kisses and caresses—following the pomp of Christian sacrament, I hasten to add, for I am punctilious in all religious observances. As I was saying—what was I saying?

KING. Your pressing attentions to the princess—

ASTOLOF. Ah yes. They will blot that other from your memory. One day soon you will freely and meekly undo the clasp and—

*(Enter a servant)*

SERVANT. Your majesty, dinner will be served in one hour. *(Exits)*

ASTOLOF. One hour! Is that all? I beg your permission to withdraw, your highness, and yours, divine princess, in order to let my valet and coiffeur recompose me for the royal table.

KING. Our time is yours to command, prince.

*(More ceremony, then Astolof exits. A pause, after which the king and Estrella heave a great sigh together)*

ESTRELLA. I agree, dear uncle, but what is to be done?

KING. The Tsar forgot to mention in his letter that his son is a nitwit.

ESTRELLA. Pampered privilege.

KING. My dear, you are pampered privilege too, and yet you are wise and good—except for your attachment to that traitor.

ESTRELLA. Your heart is not in that word.

KING. Only because I dandled little Bogdan on my knees. Only because I spun tops with him and got upon all fours so he could ride on my back. Only because I wished him to replace my Sigismund, oh God!

ESTRELLA. Uncle—

KING. And then he takes to the hills to become a messiah. Talk about pampered privilege! Do you know how much blood is soaking his conscience already? Landlords hacked to pieces, innocent bystanders massacred, peasants looted for supplies, Jews murdered for serving the gentry.

ESTRELLA. As ye sow, so shall ye reap.

KING. And yourself? Well, your Bogdan has left you in capable hands! But whom could I call on in our troubles other than the Muscovites? Only—I can't help recalling that nursery tale of the man who invites a wolf to dinner. The wolf sits down with a bib under his chin. The man says, "Here's warm soup, fish, vegetables and fruit; what else would you like?" "You," answers the wolf, and gobbles up his host.

ESTRELLA. It may happen.

KING. I ought to stop caring. I dream of the cell my good Cistercians

are keeping for me in Oliwa, overlooking the Baltic; I dream of the silver sound of church-bells...the organ booming.... I ought to end my days in remorseful prayers.... Astolof would ride up and down Poland on his proud stallion, reeking of over-ripe Muscovy perfume and purging our country of Swedes and Turks for the Tsar's benefit, and you...you would slip unnoticed into the forest, find your Bogdan, and make such love to him that he'd forget his peasants.

ESTRELLA. Bogdan is no longer interested in love.

KING. Another nitwit.

ESTRELLA. I think we should dress for dinner too.

*(A pause)*

KING. Estrella, what if I made a colossal mistake twenty-one years ago? I think about it day and night.

ESTRELLA. What's done is done, uncle.

KING. What's done might yet be undone. The boy lives and God forgives. Shouldn't I prove that a good deed will always defeat the wicked stars? Klotalski tells me that Sigismund is strong and fierce. Why not put him in command and send Astolof home? No more chains! Shall I dare it, Estrella?

ESTRELLA. You are consulting me for the best way to ruin my Bogdan! I wish you had never taken me into your confidence.

KING. I needed someone dear to me to hear me sigh out my heart.

ESTRELLA. He is destined to trample you into the ground.

KING. Let him....

*(Enter a servant)*

SERVANT. Your majesty: my lord Klotalski and a young lady.

KING. Klotalski here? With a young lady? What can this mean? I shall see them at once.

*(The servant exits and then opens the door to Klotalski and Agafya. With a motion of the hand, Klotalski bids Agafya wait at a distance)*

KING. Klotalski, what news?

*(Klotalski kneels and kisses the king's hand. Agafya kneels too and then rises but remains where she is. Next, Klotalski kneels and kisses Estrella's hand)*

ESTRELLA. Welcome, dear friend.

KLOTALSKI. Sire, Princess, I have come to Cracow sooner than expected in order to attend to certain affairs—a certain lawsuit; but primarily because of this young person who was apprehended—trespassing—you best know where. I would have had her executed at once—

AGAFYA *(still at a distance)*. I didn't do nothin'!

KLOTALSKI. Be silent, girl! I should have ordered her executed at once—but the girl's simplicity and youthfulness—an aging man's compassion—the involuntariness of her trespass—

KING. How was that ascertained?

KLOTALSKI. Oh, as for that, she is an ignorant farmgirl from Muscovy, loquacious and bold enough, to be sure—but merely riding horseback into Poland *(low to the king and Estrella)* in order to settle accounts with a jilting swain. The usual story....

ESTRELLA. Poor girl!

*(Agafya curtseys at a distance)*

KLOTALSKI. Crossing the Tatras, she fell off her nag—I believe there are no mountains in Muscovy—almost broke her neck—stumbled about—and was, as I said, duly apprehended. I hope I have not offended your majesty. If I have, she can still—

KING. If she knows nothing, send her packing with a stiff warning.

KLOTALSKI. Precisely my idea. Come here, girl, and thank his majesty for—

*(Enter Astolof, dressed to kill. Agafya lets out a shriek. Astolof shrieks in return)*

AGAFYA. It's him! I thought so!

ASTOLOF. Agafya!

AGAFYA. Yes, Agafya Matveyevna Kulkova, come to get what's hers!

ASTOLOF. How—I can't believe it!—how did you— all the way—?

AGAFYA. You'll know soon enough, seducer!

KLOTALSKI (*low to the king*). Is this the Prince of Muscovy?

KING. Yes.

ASTOLOF. Get away from me!

KING. What does all this mean?

ESTRELLA. Wonderful!

KLOTALSKI. Your highness, if I had known—

ASTOLOF. Keep her away from me! This is a ghastly misunderstanding! I don't know the girl!

ESTRELLA. You named her, prince!

AGAFYA. Liar! I looked for you and I found you. This kind old nobleman eased the way for me, but don't worry, I'd have found you if you'd galloped off to the moon.

ESTRELLA. Delightful! Go on, my girl. What is your name again?

AGAFYA. Agafya, my lady, to serve you.

ESTRELLA. A good, honest Russian name. Tell us your story, and don't be shy.

ASTOLOF. Princess, for goodness' sake! These trashy stories are not fit for your ears. Sordid attempts by peasant girls to rise out of their class—persons who allege God knows what injuries—utterly nauseating!

ESTRELLA. Indeed, I am sickened already. Speak up, Agafya, nauseate us a little more.

KING. Never mind. Let's send the girl down to servants' quarters while we go in to dinner. Later on—

ASTOLOF. Yes, later on—

KLOTALSKI. The scandal must be contained—

ESTRELLA. No, uncle dear, no, Lord Klotalski, I insist on a story before dinner.

AGAFYA. It's a short one, your ladyship. This rascal of a tsarevich seduced me, not that he was much good, and then he said he was off to Cracow for a grand marriage, but first he'd find me a sweet young noble boyar for a husband. And that was the last of it. I never saw no boyar, and when I heard the traitor had gone to Poland, I saddled dad's best horse—we've got three of them on the farm—we're not trash, madam, we're well-off paupers as paupers go—and I went after him

with dad's and grandad's blessings and a few coppers in my satchel and the Virgin Mary round my neck. I'm a sinner, I know, I did say yes when the gentleman came round in all his ribbons and sweet talk in the barn and smelling so good, and I've went to confession to get absolved, but treason and lies is treason and lies and I'm here to get what's coming to me.

KING. I'm speechless. A boyar! What did the girl say? A sweet young noble boyar! And why not the prince himself?

KLOTALSKI (*feigning anger*). Shameless hussy! The dungeon is what's coming to you!

ASTOLOF. And chained to its wall to cool her off!

AGAFYA. I'll murder you first!

*(Guards stop her)*

KLOTALSKI. The world is coming to an end! (*Aside*) She's adorable.

KING. Remove the little devil!

*(Agafya screams)*

ESTRELLA. One moment! Uncle, if I promise to keep the girl a little bit muzzled and leashed, may I have her for a milkmaid on my make-believe farm? I can use a sturdy lass.

KING. Have it your way...

ASTOLOF. I protest, with your permission.

ESTRELLA. Listen to me, Agafya. Your wages here will be more to your liking than life with some fop of a nobleman; and after a year or so, you may, if you wish, return to Muscovy with an attractive dowry saved up, and marry a really useful person.

AGAFYA. Thank you, kind lady. I ain't saying yes and I ain't saying no; but while I'm thinking over how to punish that manikin, I'm willing to show your folk how we milk our cows at home. But please don't allow him to inveigle *you*, madam. You're worlds too good for him. However, you look like you're wide awake, and no man—

KLOTALSKI. Enough, chatterbox!

ESTRELLA. She's a dear, *I* say. (*To a servant*) Jan, take the girl below. Tell Barbara to find a sweet little room for her and to await my

orders.

AGAFYA. Thank you, madam. (*To Klotalski*) My lord, I kiss your feet for being kind to me except for your rough words—but I'm a rough one myself, so—

KLOTALSKI. All right all right all right! Take her away before I do something rash! (*Exeunt Agafya and the servant*) Like marrying her myself! I have no one, you understand.

KING. Fie on you, old fellow!

ESTRELLA (*laughing*). Bravo for you, Klotalski, and for recognizing merit where others don't.

KLOTALSKI. And yet I cannot forgive myself for causing—

KING. I forgive you, my friend; I forgive your kind heart.

ASTOLOF. As for myself, I assure you all around that it is certainly not the custom chez nous in Muscovy for cowgirls and the like to complain of a gentleman's courtesies. I am deeply mortified.

KING. Think nothing of it, my dear prince. And Estrella grants you a full pardon, I'm sure.

ESTRELLA. Heartily. I was afraid you might be a virgin, dear Astolof—and worse—and thus of my having the advantage of you. The cowgirl episode reassures me.

ASTOLOF. You are pleased to jest, my divine star, or stars. I am in fact a man of the most violent libidinous propulsions and appetites.

KING. Appetites! My chef must be desperate by now. Will you my two children walk into the dining room before us? I need to exchange a few words with Klotalski before joining you.

ASTOLOF. If Estrella will take my arm.

ESTRELLA. She will, dear Astolof.

*(Exeunt Estrella and Astolof)*

KLOTALSKI. I'm glad, your majesty; for I too need to speak with you in private.

KING. After I have done. My topic is Sigismund.

KLOTALSKI. Ah! So is mine.

KING. I must free him and place him on the throne at once.

KLOTALSKI. Not a moment too soon.

KING. We need a young hero.



KLOTALSKI. We do.

KING. Strong, alert, keen-witted.

KLOTALSKI. As Sigismund is.

KING. Brutal against Poland's enemies.

KLOTALSKI. Sigismund precisely.

KING. And if that fails, why then let this impossible Muscovite take the crown. I will have done what I could. A king is but a man. Listen carefully, Klotalski. You are to hurry back to Zakopane tomorrow at dawn. My physician will secretly entrust you with a powerful sleeping potion. Go to the cave at once. Speak to Sigismund of soaring eagles, read him that passage in the Iliad where Achilles slays Hector but is kind to old Priam, and have him take his evening draught compounded with the powders. He will fall into a long unshakable sleep, during which you will convey him to Cracow and carry him to a bedroom in the palace. When he wakes, we will honor him as our prince, watch him, warn him, take his measure, and come to conclusions. The hour has struck for challenging the horrid omens. God predestines; but what he predestines no living creature can tell. Twenty-one years ago I was sure I could hear God speak. Today I ask in anguish, was the voice I heard divine, or was it from hell, it tempted me and I fell? So now I act again, I undo the wrong if wrong I was. However, if Sigismund proves himself a monster as foretold, a second potion will send him snoring back to his cave, where chained again, and chained for life, he will remember his brief excursion to power as the strangest dream that ever bedevilled a man. This, Klotalski, I command as your king, as Sigismund's father, and, if Seneca spoke true when he affirmed that a king is but the slave of his nation, then as Poland's slave I beg, I beseech, I urge.

KLOTALSKI. In obeying you, my king, I obey myself. I am your absolute servant.

KING. Thanks, Klotalski. This very evening we shall acquaint the young ones with our design, and bid the Muscovite suspend his ambitions. Tomorrow, a grand proclamation to the Senate even as you are riding toward your mountain. Give me your hand, Klotalski. God prosper our adventure!

KLOTALSKI. Amen, amen! (*The stage darkens*)

**SCENE FOUR: SIGISMUND IN THE PALACE**

*(The lights come up on a great hall in the palace. Festive decorations. A harpsichord in a corner. Enter a richly arrayed but open-mouthed Sigismund, escorted by the crown chancellor and attendants)*

SIGISMUND *(dazed)*. And this?

CHANCELLOR. This, my lord, is the banqueting hall, built by your ancestor, Casimir the Great.

SIGISMUND *(dazed)*. And these?

CHANCELLOR. Banners captured from enemy regiments over the centuries; a collection to which we expect you, my lord, to make noteworthy contributions in the coming years.

*(Sigismund wanders about the room, gaping, and looks out one of the windows)*

SIGISMUND *(dazed)*. And that?

CHANCELLOR. Our matchless cathedral, my lord, conceived by your ancestor Boleslaw the Brave. *(Significantly)* Our coronations have taken place there since the year 1363.

SIGISMUND *(looking around the hall)*. And this?

CHANCELLOR. A magnificent tapestry, woven for us at Brussels. It shows young Jupiter emerging from the cave of Mount Ida, ready to strike down his father Cronus with the thunderbolt you perceive in his right hand.

SIGISMUND *(dazed)*. And this?

CHANCELLOR. One of the six thrones in the palace. Our kings can manifest their authority almost anywhere they happen to bestow themselves.

SIGISMUND *(dazed)*. And this?

CHANCELLOR. A Flemish harpsichord, presented to your late mother by the Elector of Brandenburg.

SIGISMUND *(dazed)*. And this?

CHANCELLOR. A priceless Italian mantelpiece, carved by Antonio

Lombardo and similar, my lord, to the one you were pleased to inquire about in your bedchamber.

SIGISMUND (*dazed*). Oh yes.... Where I woke up after, after.... Is that where I will be sleeping from now on?

CHANCELLOR. Yes, my lord; it is the crown prince's bedchamber.

SIGISMUND (*dazed*). It has windows....

CHANCELLOR. Overlooking the royal gardens, my lord.

SIGISMUND (*dazed*). Straight walls....

CHANCELLOR. Poland boasts of impeccable architects.

SIGISMUND (*dazed*). Pillows upon pillows....

CHANCELLOR. Goose-down from Cathay.

*(Sigismund discovers a full-length mirror)*

SIGISMUND. Ah!...

CHANCELLOR. A mirror, my lord.

*(Sigismund, overcome, stares at himself, touches his garments, his face, the mirror itself)*

CHANCELLOR. Described in so many books....

SIGISMUND. Hush! (*Tears run down his cheeks*) Sigismund.... Sigismund.... Layla has one.... So tiny.... The size of my hand.... Can you understand?

CHANCELLOR. Can anyone but you?

SIGISMUND. No.... No one.... I am this.... And I am...wonderful!

CHANCELLOR. Regal.

*(Sigismund turns away at last and looks once more around the hall)*

SIGISMUND. My friend, something is twitching at me.

CHANCELLOR. What can it be, my lord?

SIGISMUND. I know! My regal self is hungry!

CHANCELLOR. Is it any wonder, after such high emotions? But this was anticipated by our good Vladimir, who is master of your father's household. A modest repast is about to be served. Sit, my lord.

SIGISMUND. Sit? Where?

CHANCELLOR. Here, Prince Sigismund; where else?

SIGISMUND. This bench?

CHANCELLOR (*laughing*). Not a bench, my lord; an elegant *fauteuil*.

SIGISMUND. I don't like laughing.

CHANCELLOR. I humbly apologize, my lord. Will you be so good as to sit?

*(Sigismund sits down and examines the crystal, silverware, porcelain, and so on. He drops a glass on the floor and it breaks. A lackey cleans up)*

SIGISMUND. It broke....

CHANCELLOR. Do not give it another thought, my lord. You own hundreds of these.

SIGISMUND. What are they made of?

CHANCELLOR. Crystal, if you please.

SIGISMUND. Crystal.... So this is crystal.... And this must be silver....

CHANCELLOR. It is, my lord. The dishes are purest Saxon porcelain, and the salt cellar was carved for us by a pupil of Cellini. But here at last comes your *consommé*.

*(The consommé arrives to a fanfare. Sigismund is puzzled)*

SIGISMUND. Will there always be music, no matter what I do?

CHANCELLOR. We fervently hope so, my lord.

*(Sigismund begins to eat. A dark-hued dancing girl enters, performs to the sound of a tambourine and bows)*

SIGISMUND. An Egyptian dancing-girl! And how she danced!

CHANCELLOR. A thousand dancing-girls are yours, my lord; and at a nod from you, this one will also—but here come more pleasures for your palate.

*(He signals to the dancing-girl, who leaves. Led by Vladimir, servants appear carrying numerous dishes and flagons)*

VLADIMIR. Your highness, allow me to present: pheasant; bear; calf; lamb; oxen; hares; salmon; perch; truffles; mangoes; persimmon; and an assortment of greens. Our youngest wines are a century old.

SIGISMUND. I'll amaze Layla! *(He eats and drinks)* I think I'm tremendously happy. *(To the chancellor)* Here, taste the wine.

CHANCELLOR. Thank you, my lord. Superb!

SIGISMUND. I forget who you are.

CHANCELLOR. My name is Florian, duke of Radziwill, my lord, and I am the nation's crown chancellor.

SIGISMUND. My head feels heavy since waking up.

CHANCELLOR. You will feel better as the day wears on and your glories multiply.

SIGISMUND. Were you one of the people who dressed me?

CHANCELLOR. Certainly not, my lord. You were dressed by four subalterns of the wardrobe.

SIGISMUND. And will I always be dressed by others?

CHANCELLOR. Always, my lord, even on the battlefield.

SIGISMUND. And is the sword mine to keep? It is a finer one than what I exercised with in...in the past.

CHANCELLOR. It is your sword, my lord, and was given you before your birth by Prince Gabor of Transylvania.

SIGISMUND. I am going to amaze the world with this sword. For I begin to understand that I am the man I dreamed I am.

CHANCELLOR. You are, and may God bless you.

*(Servants bring dessert. Enter Ladislaw Szopen)*

VLADIMIR. Your highness, may I introduce, along with this Persian sorbet, our chief musician, Ladislaw Szopen, who will now play a sarabande composed for this unforgettable occasion.

*(Szopen soulfully performs, but what emerges is the folk tune we have heard before, still played on a lute, though faultlessly this time. As he plays, Sigismund rises from the table, sorbet in hand, and sobbing)*

SIGISMUND. I never heard it so beautiful before.... I feel all strange....

SZOPEN. It is the power of music, your highness; music hath the power to soothe the savage breast.

SIGISMUND. It does, it does. I am becoming a better man. Kindness, justice, ideals of every kind animate me, thanks to you. No more chains.... *(He returns to the table)* Here...take this, and this, and this.

*(He gives Szopen a great quantity of silverware and porcelain. The chancellor and Vladimir look uneasy)*

SZOPEN. Prince! Such bounty! I proudly accept. I accept in the name of Art, which flourishes only when kings and princes patronize it.

*(He kneels as best he can with the objects he is holding)*

SIGISMUND. Oh, I like that! At last! *(He walks all around Szopen, patting him on the head)* Rise, artist, go in peace, and soothe as many breasts in Poland as there are notes lurking in your fingers.

SZOPEN. Prince, I humbly take my leave.

*(Exit Szopen with his gifts, picking up one or two that fall on the floor)*

SIGISMUND *(to Vladimir and the servants)*. Now you, my friends, all of you gather round and do like the musician, kneel a little too.

VLADIMIR *(kneeling)*. Hail, Prince Sigismund!

THE SERVANTS *(likewise)*. Hail, Prince Sigismund!

SIGISMUND. God bless you. Now you, Radziwill.

CHANCELLOR. My lord?

SIGISMUND. You. Your turn. Join these good people and kneel piously to me.

CHANCELLOR. My lord, the peers of Poland are exempt from kneeling, except to the pope. An inclination of twenty degrees from the waist is all—

SIGISMUND. I don't understand. What peers? Is a prince better than a peer, yes or no?

CHANCELLOR. Perhaps, my lord; but both custom and law circumscribe—

SIGISMUND. Do a somersault!

CHANCELLOR. What?

SIGISMUND. Jump out the window!

CHANCELLOR. This mockery is inadmissible. I am—

SIGISMUND. You are nothing! *They're kneeling! You kneel with them! (He draws his sword)*

CHANCELLOR. Never!

*(He draws too. The others rise in disarray. But suddenly another fanfare is sounded, and enter the king, wearing a crown, and after him Klotalski, Estrella, Astolof, and soldiers)*

KING. What do I see? Put up your swords, both of you! *(Sigismund gapes)* Radziwill, explain to me! Your sword raised against my son?

CHANCELLOR. Never, your majesty! In the course of introducing our beloved prince to his new métier, I was demonstrating a new thrust recommended by Carranza.

KING. I breathe again. Yes, Sigismund, here I am, King Bazylic, your father. Sheathe your mighty sword. Come to my arms. Kiss your most unfortunate parent.

*(Sigismund allows himself to be embraced)*

KING. Attend to me, my son, for the tale I must tell you will stir the deepest recesses of your soul. Twenty-one years ago, at your birth, the most horrid omens ever seen in Poland revealed that you, my son, were destined to inflict merciless carnage upon our land. Many argued that you be put to death instantly. But, horrified by the thought, I decided to secrete you to a distant cave, where you were lovingly raised by the faithful castellan of Zakopane, my beloved Lord Klotalski. To the nation I announced that you had died in your cradle. I raised your fair cousin Estrella so as to fit her for the succession. But my remorse never drew back the claw it had plunged into my heart from the beginning. Had these awesome omens stamped out a decision of almighty God? Or had they been nothing more than a test of my Christian charity, and had I not wretchedly failed that test by cowering before mere signs? I have no answer, O Sigismund, but I have brought you home, and I implore you to defy the portents and to show yourself

magnanimous to your land and a scourge only to its louting enemies. I have brought you home, my son, but beware! You may be dreaming that I have brought you home. Your father, this palace, these lords and servants might dissolve, and will dissolve, I say, if you prove cruel to us. Be cruel, and you may wake again in a cave and never dream this dream again.... Estrella, give me your hand. My son, this is your dear cousin, who gladly renounces the throne for you.

ESTRELLA (*kneeling*). Welcome, cousin! I humbly kiss your hand. Be just to the Polish people, lest all this splendor turn into a dream.

KING. Astolof, greet your fellow prince.

ASTOLOF. Greetings, Prince Sigismund, from the tsarevich of Muscovy. Ally yourself to us, my friend, lest all this glory turn into a dream.

KING. Klotalski!

KLOTALSKI (*embracing Sigismund, who is still gaping*). My prince, my pupil, my child. Yes, I am your Klotalski! Be charitable to your kindly father and myself, lest all this happiness turn into a dream.

KING. And now, let us cry Long live Prince Sigismund, defender of the Crown, rampart against the Turks, lion to the Swedes!

ALL. Long live Prince Sigismund!

KING. And let us have triumphant music!

*(Another brilliant fanfare)*

SIGISMUND (*howling*). Stop the noise!

*(Abrupt silence)*

SIGISMUND. Your omens came from hell!

*(He walks up to the king, and with his two hands on the latter's shoulders, firmly presses him to a kneeling position. He then removes Bazylic's crown, places it on his own head, and stands powerfully in front of the throne)*

SIGISMUND. I am the king of Poland!

THE SOLDIERS. Hurrah! Hurrah! Long live King Sigismund!



*Sigismund, Prince of Poland*

*(The others are stunned)*

KING *(prostrate)*. Oh my son.....

*(Blackout)*

## SCENE FIVE: THE GOBLET

*(The lights come up again on the palace hall. A servant is cleaning up. Startled by the approaching tumult, he hurries out. Enter Astolof, pursued by Agafya)*

ASTOLOF. Get away from me, you hussy! Go back to your cows! I've troubles enough without your snarling at me all day long.

AGAFYA. I'll go back to my cows after I've had justice done to me.

ASTOLOF. Back to Muscovy on your nag!

AGAFYA. As soon as you've given me the husband you promised me.

ASTOLOF *(stopping)*. Dear little Agafya, I *am* giving you a husband. My own assistant groom of the wardrobe. He agrees. He's honored. A fine strapping lad, all sinews and hair on his chest. I have promised him five hundred silver crowns if you'll take him.

AGAFYA. How dare you! Just wait—I'll assistant groom you!

ASTOLOF. You're tearing my sleeve!

AGAFYA. You promised to marry me!

ASTOLOF. Ha! The girl is mad!

AGAFYA. Or find me a real boyar!

ASTOLOF. The assistant groom or nothing!

AGAFYA. I'll show you nothing!

*(She attacks him with her nails)*

ASTOLOF. Help! My cheek is bleeding! Help! Guards!

*(He tears himself away and flees)*

AGAFYA *(pursuing him)*. Yes, run for your life, you Muscovy frizzle-head! *(Exits)*

*(Enter the king and Klotalski, in hushed conversation)*

KING. Visiting the kitchens and fraternizing with pots and pans I can

wink at—after twenty-one years in a cave—God forgive me my sins. And making hot speeches to street-sweepers I can try to swallow. But how can I ever forget that humiliating scene—with my own soldiers applauding and yelling hurrah. They ought to be court-martialed—but I haven't the courage.

KLOTALSKI. Don't dwell on that terrible image. Let *it* be a dream.

KING. A nightmare. Oh, he allows me to hug and hold him, and he did return my crown, but then he stares and stares at me as though I were a picture on a wall and says nothing for minutes on end. What do our informers in town report?

KLOTALSKI. Excitement.

KING. Of what kind?

KLOTALSKI. They love having a native prince, a man of Poland, and curse the Muscovy alliance.

KING. And blame me for chaining him up?

KLOTALSKI. —

KING. You needn't answer. Listen, Klotalski, there are millions of brutal serfs and drunken townspeople in this country, and only thousands of us. Worse yet, they have that traitor Bogdan to goad them. We *must* find a way of enraging Sigismund against Opalinski instead of us.

KLOTALSKI. Your majesty....

KING. What? What now?

KLOTALSKI (*hesitating*). He has sent for Opalinski.

(*The king stares*)

KLOTALSKI. Radziwill heard it less than an hour ago but didn't have the heart to bring you the news himself.

KING. The dream is over.

KLOTALSKI. My liege?

KING. Back to the cave. I hesitated, my father's heart pleaded, but this satanic blaze must be quenched before it consumes us all. The omens didn't lie. Back to the cave. And after that I'll lead the troops myself. I may be old but I can still mount my horse and fire a pistol. Here, Klotalski. Here is the powder again. The very same. Go talk to old Vladimir, who thinks I am God incarnate. He will do what's needed.

And once you have Sigismund in chains again, remove Layla, free her, give her a satchel of diamonds, and send her back to Turkey in a coach-and-six so she doesn't give us away, while you persuade him that it was all a mysterious dream, an illusion. Are you ready to do your duty, *Duke of Zakopane*?

KLOTALSKI (*kissing the king's hand*). Your majesty will be obeyed to the last dot in your command. (*Exits*)

KING (*alone*). At last, at last a moment of peace. Not even a lackey in sight. Blessed silence! It takes a king to be pelted with jabber from morning to night. Friends with wise advice. Enemies with underhanded insinuations. Place-seekers who always deserve better. Ministers alarmed. Ambassadors protesting. And from every man's lips that eternal and predictable "I am right, he is wrong, I am good, he is bad." Oh my son, my only child, I would so gladly have abdicated in your favor quite without that mountain-weight of your strong hands on my shoulders which I shall feel to my dying day! But in your eyes I see gruesome spectacles of civic destruction.... My fault, my fault.... Sin begets sin.... Dear God, grant me my peaceful monastery by the sea, mild church-bells, steady predictable sea-waves, and no more babble.... Let me pray....

(*He kneels at a prie-dieu. Enter Klotalski and the chancellor*)

KLOTALSKI (*in a low voice*). Your majesty...

KING. Yes?

KLOTALSKI. Radziwill has more news.

KING. How bad?

CHANCELLOR. Prince Sigismund is coming up the hill.

KING. What of it?

CHANCELLOR. I hurried ahead of him to warn you.

KING. Has he come to murder his father?

CHANCELLOR. No. But he marched into the jail, freed the convicts, and is leading them to the castle. And there is more. Your majesty, Bogdan Opalinski has been observed lurking in the forest of Dulova an hour's horseback ride from Cracow.

KING (*strangled voice*). What is the Palace Guard doing?

CHANCELLOR. They daren't move against the prince without your express command.

*(Enter servants carrying refreshments which they place on a table)*

KLOTALSKI *(discreetly)*. The goblet with the Polish eagle.

KING *(distracted)*. What? What?

KLOTALSKI. The goblet with the Polish eagle. For your son.

KING. Good.

*(Sound of marching and clanging chains outside)*

KING *(to the chancellor)*. Call the Guard!

*(Exit the chancellor one way as Sigismund enters from another, at the head of a band of armed ruffians, their chains still dangling from neck, arm or ankle)*

SIGISMUND. Hail father, hail tutor, hail Hecataeus, hail dream of freedom, hail all the chained wretches of the world, my brothers-in-fetters, hail, hail!

CONVICTS. Long live our beloved liberator!

A CONVICT. Ain't this a grand place!

SIGISMUND. Welcome to my palace! It is your house now! Kiss me, father. I have done hard work and I'm thirsty.

CONVICTS. So are we!

KING. Welcome my son! Welcome citizens!

KLOTALSKI *(taking the hint)*. Welcome citizens!

KING. Men of Poland, Fortune smiles on you today. Behold! The table is set as if it had guessed that you were coming. Your servants are pouring the ale. Help yourselves, and here, my son, allow me, your father and your king, to serve you.

*(He hands him the eagle-goblet)*

CONVICTS. Long live King Bazylic! Long live Poland and Saint Bacchus!

SIGISMUND. I drink to a new age! But wait. (*He puts down the goblet*) Klotalski my friend, I haven't forgotten the books you made me read. Listen everybody!

A CONVICT. Shut up you apes and listen to our savior!

SIGISMUND. "Care for us? They ne'er cared for us yet." *They*, my friends, are the nobles, the patricians, the tutors, the kings, the chain-makers, and *us* is the poor. Listen to the poet! "Yea, suffer us to famish, and their storehouses crammed with grain."

A CONVICT. That's the Bible truth.

A CONVICT. Long live poetry!

SIGISMUND. Listen to the poet! "Repeal daily any wholesome act established against the rich, and provide more piercing statutes daily to chain up—chain up!—and restrain the poor. If the Swedish wars eat us not up, they will; and there's all the love they bear us."

CONVICTS (*sobbing and drinking*). Ain't it the truth? Rich bastards! Christ have mercy on the poor.

A CONVICT. And me in jail for stealing a loaf of bread for my children!

SIGISMUND. Drink, my friends, drink!

KLOTALSKI. Dear dear Sigismund, my pupil, I can't help applauding your generosity, and I'm proud of you. Here is your cup. Let me drink to you.

SIGISMUND. I'll drink with you, you old slave-driver, because I'm in command now. No more lashes for the wayward boy!

KLOTALSKI. No indeed! Hail to—

(*A man comes dashing in, and whispers urgently into Sigismund's ear*)

SIGISMUND. Tell him to come up at once! (*He puts down the goblet*) Ah my friends, I am about to show you something wilder than Egyptian dancing girls! (*To a servant*) Summon Prince Astolof, Princess Estrella, and all the senators you can find in the castle, and also that girl, that Agafya I conversed with in the kitchen. Yes father, I shall overcome the auguries, I shall be a blessing not a curse on Poland. The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped, and the tongues of the dumb, yea the tongues of the dumb shall sing!

KING. If you can be and do so much, my beloved son, what happiness for me! But (*handing him the eagle-goblet*) drink, drink, make merry with the rest of us. Oh my God! Bogdan!

(*Enter Bogdan Opalinski, dressed with romantic Robin Hood elegance. Sigismund puts down the goblet. Bogdan advances toward the king, briefly kneels before him, then turns toward Sigismund*)

BOGDAN. Prince Sigismund, for I guess you must be he, I have answered your summons, and I come to make my obeisance.

(*He kneels before Sigismund and kisses his hand*)

CONVICTS. Hurrah for Opalinski!

SIGISMUND. Rise, Baron Opalinski. You are my man—and theirs. (*To the convicts*) Gentlemen! Eat and drink quietly while I confer with our hero.

(*He embraces Bogdan and speaks with him aside. Enter the chancellor*)

CHANCELLOR (*into the king's ear*). Opalinski's bandits have overpowered the Guard.

KING. Where's Colonel Lubomirski?

CHANCELLOR. Fled.

SIGISMUND (*to the convicts*). Men! Baron Opalinski has agreed to enlist you into his army of liberation. Fortune does indeed smile on all of you today. Come! Swear allegiance to him at once.

CONVICTS. Wait a moment!

SIGISMUND. Why?

A CONVICT. Because—what will you do for us if we fight at your side, Bogdan Opalinski?

BOGDAN. What is it you demand, brave lads?

A CONVICT. Land!

ANOTHER. Honest paid work!

ANOTHER. Free money!

ANOTHER. Cheap women!

ANOTHER. Turkish slaves!

ANOTHER. Schools and hospitals!

ANOTHER. No more aristocrats!

ANOTHER. No taxes on liquor!

BOGDAN (*laughing*). Aren't they wonderful?

SIGISMUND. The salt of the earth! Unchained convicts, men of Poland, now that you have heard him, you are his soldiers. Swear allegiance!

A CONVICT. We swear to follow Baron Opalinski and Prince Sigismund through fire and flood!

THE OTHERS. We swear!

BOGDAN. Welcome all! I shall give you God's work to do and make you lords of Poland. (*He turns to the king*) My king and almost my father—for I have not forgotten that you cared for me as a child—I have taken the liberty of subduing your Palace Guard as surety for our safe egress from the city. For myself, King Bazylic, the whole world knows that I have emancipated the Opalinski serfs. The peasants are now my free tenants, my lands are prospering, my people are happy. I beg you, I urge you to follow suit on all crown properties in Poland and Lithuania. This will set an example unheard of in the sad annals of mankind: an example, I say, for our stubborn magnates, an inspiration for them to turn Poland from the hell it is now to the paradise it could become.

SIGISMUND. Amen.

CONVICTS. Hurrah!

KING. Irresistible Bogdan! My own child! Come to my arms! I shall do what you say. Tears dazzle my old eyes!

BOGDAN. And mine, your majesty. O happiness!

KING. Let us drink to our reconciliation. Klotalski, a goblet for Bogdan, and here is yours, my son. (*He hands him the eagle-goblet*)

SIGISMUND. This is a glorious day! Here is to paradise!

*(A servant appears in the doorway)*

SERVANT. Prince Astolof and Princess Estrella!



*(Sigismund puts down the goblet. Enter Astolof and Estrella, attended, with Agafya behind them. Estrella screams and rushes into Bogdan's arms)*

ESTRELLA. Bogdan! My Bogdan!

BOGDAN. Faithful to me, Estrella?

ESTRELLA. To my dying breath! O my beloved!

ASTOLOF. Look here!

BOGDAN. My joy, my bride! *(To Sigismund)* Prince, I entered Cracow by your leave in order to kneel before you, bind myself to your service forever and receive your commands; but also, I can joyfully confess it now, in order to claim my bride.

ASTOLOF. One moment!

SIGISMUND. Take her. I bless you both. Look at them! A fairy-tale of the New Age! What is life without love? Well! I look contentedly around, and if this is not a dream I am dreaming, as *some* of my friends have intimated, I will be sending presently for my plump Layla, and by the Holy Trinity I'll have the archbishop marry us. However, Baron Opalinski, let not romantic love blind you like another Marc Antony. Take your men, along with your new recruits, to the Senate. Have them scoop up the lords who haven't fled to their estates. Demand freedom for their serfs and distribution of their lands. And if they refuse—do whatever God demands and your conscience requires.

BOGDAN. Men! Follow me!

CONVICTS. Hurrah!

BOGDAN. My angel, hand in hand with me into my dangerous world?

ESTRELLA. Yes, my hero, yes, yes!

ASTOLOF. Look here!

BOGDAN *(to Sigismund)*. Prince, I shall bring you remarkable tidings within the hour. *(To the convicts)* Line up, men! Two by two! Hold the chains in your hands and march. Forward! March! Chests out! My love, make your farewells.

*(The convicts leave. Estrella hugs the king)*

ESTRELLA. I love you, dearest uncle, but this is Fate, isn't it? I'll be praying every day that you come to no harm.

KING. I love you too. Be careful in the cold....

ESTRELLA. Will you have a few things sent after me? But only my roughest dresses.

KING. I will, my poor child....

ESTRELLA (*to Sigismund*). Prince! May you reign for a century over happy Poland!

SIGISMUND. And may your courage and high principles inspire the women of Poland!

ESTRELLA (*bowing to Astolof*). Prince, happy return journey to Muscovy and my respects to the Tsar.

ASTOLOF. One moment!

*(She bows to the others. Bogdan does the same, and elegantly leads her out)*

SIGISMUND (*raising the eagle-goblet*). And now—I'm hoarse and parched—

*(Agafya, who has been half-hidden in the background, rushes up to Sigismund who puts down the goblet)*

AGAFYA. Prince Sigismund! A boon!

SIGISMUND. Greetings, Agafya. Anything you wish. I hadn't seen you.

ASTOLOF. Look here! These women are all lunatics.

KLOTALSKI. Later, Agafya dear; I will personally—

SIGISMUND. Silence, all you gaudy oppressors! I have not forgotten the tale of injury you told me, Agafya, when I was still enslaved in my cave; nor have I forgotten who was the author of that injury. Let me hear the boon you ask of me.

AGAFYA. Oh my lord, you are the god of all of us victims. Look at him trying to hide!

ASTOLOF. Fiddlesticks! Who is this farmgirl to bewitch the whole Polish court with her twaddle?

AGAFYA. Force him to make restitution to me, my lord! Now that his darling princess has run off with a better man—

KING. Sigismund, for God's sake!

KLOTALSKI (*at the same time*). Will she never stop?

SIGISMUND. I insist on hearing her out, father.

AGAFYA. I kiss your hand, my lord. I haven't told you yet that my dad and my two brothers must work his land four days out of seven for nothing, zero, not even a sack of flour. And for me, after he'd got his pleasure of me, not so much as a letter or a sprig of flowers. Five copper coins thrown into my apron, that's all.

KING. Well, I can't help being touched by her story. Poor girl, my son and I will compensate you for your troubles, believe me: I'm a tiger for justice. Come here. (*To a servant*) You, pour the pretty lass a cup of wine; and you, son, refresh yourself at last while we ponder—(*he hands Sigismund the eagle-goblet*)

SIGISMUND. Ponder what? (*He puts down the goblet*). Astolof, hands off that door; and a word with you nose to nose. (*To the servants*) Guard all the doors, you people!

ASTOLOF (*blustering*). How dare you! I tell you I've had enough! Instead of wedding feasts I predict war between our two countries, and I warn you all that for every Pole who carries a sword we can muster ten Muscovites and Tatars, regular savages each one of them.

SIGISMUND. Not half as savage as Sigismund. Take Agafya's hand in yours and marry her as consolation for Estrella.

ASTOLOF. Ha! You cave-man! Marry her yourself and set up housekeeping under the mountain where you belong.

SIGISMUND. I must be dreaming after all. Is this fluff of ribbons threatening me?

KING. Patience, my son.

CHANCELLOR (*at the same time*). Allow me to interpose.

KLOTALSKI (*at the same time*). Nothing in the heat of passion, my dear boy.

SIGISMUND. Lackeys—you—run to the cathedral and fetch me a priest!

A SERVANT. At once, your highness. (*Exits*)

KING. By your mother's soul—

ASTOLOF (*drawing*). Open the door! I declare war on Poland and demand punctilious protection for me and mine, with full safe-conduct to the border.

KING. Granted!

*(Astolof tries to leave)*

AGAFYA. Stop him, my lord!

SIGISMUND (*drawing*). Trust me. I counter-declare war, you Muscovite flea!

*(A brief skirmish. Sigismund easily knocks Astolof's sword out of his hand, sheathes his own, seizes Astolof by the waist and lifts him)*

ASTOLOF. Help! My retinue! Help!

SIGISMUND (*to a lackey*). Open that window!

SERVANT. At once, your highness.

KING. Sigismund! Stop, for God's sake, stop!

KLOTALSKI. My lord, let me talk to you first!

CHANCELLOR. Think of the law of nations, think of our honor!

ASTOLOF (*at the same time*). Help! Help!

*(Sigismund throws him out of the window)*

ASTOLOF (*his voice receding*). Aaaaaaah.....

*(Agafya screams and rushes out)*

SIGISMUND (*leaning out*). A mess of spangles and flesh. And there comes the priest—good, it's Father Radim—just in time for an unexpected sacrament.

*(He closes the window)*

KING (*more dead than alive*). The Muscovites will march against us from the east. Bogdan and his ruffians are scorching the land in the center. The Swedes are invading from the north, and the Turks

threaten from the south. Are you satisfied, Sigismund?

SIGISMUND. I am a giant. God is with me. Millions of liberated serfs will rise like a single Titan to shatter feeble tyrants and their hirelings. Look happy, father, Klotalski—Klotalski, what's the matter with you?

KLOTALSKI. Nothing, my lord, a moment of dizziness....

SIGISMUND. It will pass. Rejoice, I say again, father, Klotalski, Radziwill, and you, dear faithful servants. The blood I shed will irrigate—

*(Re-enter Agafya, a changed woman; with her, Father Radim. She stops at the threshold)*

AGAFYA *(in a solemn voice)*. After laying his royal curse on Poland, Prince Astolof espoused me and expired. Father Radim was kind enough to perform both sacraments *in extremis*, and to place the royal ring on my finger.

FATHER RADIM. Confirmatus est.

AGAFYA. The brief wedding ceremony was witnessed by the prince's groom of the wardrobe and his assistant, who appeared when they heard their master's cry of distress. I am now Princess Agafya of Muscovy, and as such I shall give orders to my people to prepare for departure the moment I have changed into something suitably black. My beloved husband's cadaver will, of course, travel with us. As for the consequences of the treacherous act of regicide committed today in this palace, I shall only say that they will be violent. I have already despatched a trusted officer to our capital with instructions to give an unbiased report of the crime. Our next message will come to you from the mouth of a cannon. Adieu. Father Radim, I shall want your prayerful support in my bereavement during our journey home. *(Both leave)*

SIGISMUND. Look here!

KLOTALSKI *(to the king)*. Poland is dead if he doesn't drink up soon, your majesty.

KING *(in a daze)*. You're right. *(Handing Sigismund the eagle-goblet)* Son, this is a blow. Sit down, drink up, and let us ponder—

SIGISMUND. Ponder fire and blood! Did you hear that witch talking to me? A low-born farmgirl? I'm speechless! Your books didn't

prepare me for this scene, Klotalski! The little upstart! Shouldn't I stop her?

CHANCELLOR. That would be useless, prince. The officer is despatched and will certainly ride his horse like a demon. We must draw up a new set of urgent plans and mobilize—

SIGISMUND. Mobilize! Magic word! Three million serfs will leap—. What this noise? If it's Agafya again, I'll throttle her!

*(Szopen rushes in)*

SZOPEN. The Revolution has begun, and I hail it thus!

*(He flings himself on the harpsichord and plays with wild flourishes. This time the sounds that emerge are those of a triumphant trumpet. Enter Bogdan and his convicts, two by two, each pair carrying a dead man on a litter)*

BOGDAN *(kneeling before Sigismund)*. Prince, your commands have been punctually obeyed.

*(The king, Klotalski and the chancellor hold each other up. The bodies, dripping blood, parade in a circle before Sigismund. Szopen stops playing as all the church-bells of Cracow toll. They will continue to the end of the scene. Bogdan calls the roll)*

BOGDAN. The tyrant Baron Tarnowski, 4,000 serfs and 80 villages. The tyrant Duke of Pultusk, 17,000 serfs and 166 villages. The tyrant Count Poniatowski, 85,000 serfs and 3,000 villages. Ladislaw Popnik, serf. The tyrant Baron Jablonowski, 46,000 serfs and 3,700 villages. The tyrant Count Potocki, crown treasurer.

SIGISMUND. Why Popnik?

BOGDAN. For attempting to defend his master, the tyrant Count Poniatowski.

CHANCELLOR *(sobbing)*. My friends, my friends.....

SIGISMUND *(imbruig his hand)*. He hath stretched forth his hand against them, and hath smitten them. But fear not! This bloody earth shall be plowed under. A garden shall rise from it. Man, woman and child shall sing aloud—

*(A tremendous howl of lamentation off-stage interrupts him)*

KING. Christ have mercy on our souls.

SIGISMUND. What is that?

BOGDAN. Wives, children, fathers and mothers of the criminals.

SZOPEN. I shall weep for them in music!

*(The howl ceases and is replaced by a great noise of splashing water)*

SIGISMUND. Now what?

BOGDAN. Criminal blood washed from stairways and courtyard.

SIGISMUND. Let there be cascades!

KLOTALSKI *(to the king)*. My liege, save us, save us!

*(The king recomposes himself)*

KING. Cascades, my son, and you so miserably thirsty?

*(He hands him the eagle-goblet)*

SIGISMUND. Thank you, father. Why is your hand trembling so? Mine is red but firm. Are you with or against me?

KING *(weeping)*. How can I be against justice?

*(Sigismund raises the goblet)*

SIGISMUND. Well done, Bogdan Opalinski! I hereby create and ordain you first Grand Master of the Holy Order of Saint Peter Unchained, and grant you and your heirs eternal freehold in the domains of the barons, dukes, counts and prelates you have executed so far or will hereafter execute. Long live the Revolution!

BOGDAN. Long live Sigismund!

THE CONVICTS. Sigismund and Bogdan forever!

SIGISMUND. You the artist, celebrate! And father, Klotalski, Radziwill: raise your voices too!

ALL THREE *(weeping)*. Sigismund forever!

*(Sigismund drinks, Szopen plays, and again the sound is that of a trumpet. The church-bells ring. The king, the chancellor and Klotalski clasp each other. Finally the stage grows dark)*



## SCENE SIX: SIGISMUND IN CHAINS AGAIN

*(When the lights return, we are in front of the cave again. It is late afternoon. Sigismund is chained once more. Books on the table. Layla is peeling and cutting a large assortment of vegetables and herbs and tossing everything into a pot. Sigismund, book in hand, is staring at her work. Evening will come slowly on as in Act One. After a little while, Layla becomes aware of Sigismund's attention and gives him a questioning look)*

SIGISMUND. This may be why.... You subtle Turk.... You waded into the woods picking God knows what and trying new edibles on me.... I'm glad you love me because if you didn't, I might take you for some murderous Medea.... But the meat and stews are always delicious, and so are the soups, and so is all your cookery.... But they often do taste... I don't know... experimental. Delicious but experimental.... And one of your hellish innovations must have made me dream so vividly.... Enormous, rich, bloody, ravaging, thrilling dream.....

*(Layla motions to him to continue reading)*

SIGISMUND. I know, I know.... But I don't concentrate as well as I did before I.... Day after day I inspect it.... I can't leave it alone....

*(Layla makes impatient noises)*

SIGISMUND *(sighing)*. You're right. And so is dear old Klotalski. Besides, the poets know best. *(He reads)*

Farewell ye gilded follies, pleasing troubles,  
Farewell ye honored rags, ye glorious bubbles;  
Fame's but a hollow echo, gold mere clay,  
Glory the darling but of one short day.  
Welcome pure thoughts, welcome you silent groves,  
These leafy shades my soul most dearly loves.

*(He looks around and shakes his head half dubiously)*

A prayer-book now shall be my looking-glass—

*(He stops)*

My looking-glass.... I'd forgotten! Give me your mirror, Layla. *(She obeys with a show of petulance. He gazes at himself)* Poor me.... Imagine a mirror taller than myself, and Sigismund in it, wonderful and regal.... And now, rags in a broken glass.... Take it back. The poets know best.

*(He picks up the book again)*

A prayer-book now shall be my looking-glass,  
Wherein I will adore sweet Virtue's face.  
Here dwell no hateful looks, no palace cares,  
No lurking crimes beget pale fears.  
Here will I shun ambition's folly,  
And learn to prize a holy melancholy.  
And if contentment prove a stranger still,  
I'll seek it nowhere but in Heaven's will.

*(He sighs)*

There speaks a wise Pole.... *(Long pause)* Did I tell you that I threw a man out of a window? Yes I did tell you. Ten times, I guess! What a scream he let out! And then I dreamed of the girl who'd fallen from her horse.... But that's natural enough.... The little viper....

Farewell, ye gilded follies....

*(Layla has been lighting a few torches as night approaches. Sigismund turns the page)*

Here's another wise fellow. But if they're so wise, these poets, why do they give opposite advice?

*(He reads with a martial voice)*

'Tis time to leave the books in dust  
And oil the unused armor's rust  
And like the falcon high  
Dive furious from the sky.

So restless Caesar would not cease  
In the inglorious arts of peace,  
But through adventurous war  
Urged his active star....

*(He pauses, then suddenly rises)* Hail Prince Sigismund! Savior of Poland! You—down on your knees!.... Oh, it felt glorious, glorious!  
*(He sits down again)* But what were all those corpses doing in my dream? To be sure, they were dead rascals. On the other hand, who'd be left, Layla—Layla! What are you doing? Come here and sit down. The question I'm asking you is, who'd be left if all the rascals had to go?.... Just you. Certainly not myself. Oh no, not I.... I think too much, damn it. Opalinski didn't look left nor right before he.... I gave the order, though.... I think I did....

Welcome pure thoughts....

I was cruel to the king of Poland my dream-father, Layla.... And to Klotalski.... In that riotous nightmare of mine I made the omens come true.... I was a superb beast!... The dream may have meant: Sigismund, know once and for all why thou art fettered to thy cave! Or it may have meant: Sigismund, thou art not a peasant's son, thou art the son of a king; seize the thunderbolt; save thy country!

*(Bugles sound in the distance)*

Listen! As if somebody had heard me!... Glorious armies on the road! Our men marching against the Turks.... Or the Turks marching against us.... Glorious, terrible bloodshed.... The books always talk about bloodshed—bloodshed! bloodshed!—but when you really see puddles

of red liquid on the stairways and in the courtyard—and the sticky red on your own hand—believe me, Layla.... And Astolof spread out on the cobble-stones with his eyes open....

I will adore sweet Virtue's face....

Those trumpets again!.... Gone.... No, I think the dream was God's warning to me. I think I think so.... Did I tell you that in my dream there was music too? And a girl dancing.... But that was after.... No, before.... Wait....

*(Night has fallen. Sigismund sings the folk tune, pretends to play the harpsichord, and dances. The chain dins horribly. Layla enjoys and applauds)*

I'm a giant! The Revolution has come! You dance to it too, Layla! Dance! Dance! Dance!

*(He sings, plays, dances, the chain rattles, and Layla joins him. Suddenly Bogdan appears with three of the convicts. All are heavily armed and carry axes etc.)*

BOGDAN. Prince Sigismund! Chained like a galley-slave! Horrible sight!

*(Sigismund is thunderstruck. Layla retreats towards her cabin. Bogdan kneels)*

BOGDAN. You are amazed to see me here, my liege, and no wonder! But well met again! Well met and happily!

SIGISMUND *(in a strangled voice throughout)*. Bogdan? Bogdan Opalinski? Oh my God my God!

BOGDAN *(rising)*. Your Bogdan indeed; though dressed rather more shabbily than I was when you last saw me! Dressed, one might say, like a beginner.

SIGISMUND. But it was a dream!

BOGDAN. It was and is and will be until we the soldiers of that dream realize it on earth. And, by God, realize it we shall now that we have found you gloriously alive. Look at these men, my lord, these soldiers. Do they look disheartened? Even though so many of their comrades have fallen?

ONE CONVICT. We're alive and full of fight, my lord.

ANOTHER. And happy as lords that we found you, your highness!

THE THIRD. You what opened the prison-gates for us!

SIGISMUND. But what happened to me? How did I—

BOGDAN. You don't know? They told you nothing here?

SIGISMUND. Nothing....

BOGDAN. The savages! I'll make it brief, my prince. After your bold defenestration of the tyrant Astolof, and after they banished you again, the Muscovites came roaring into Poland, massacring your father's men and mine without distinction. We were obliged to regroup in the hills. Now I stand back while the two oppressors of the people slaughter each other. When the historic hour strikes, I will take to the field again and fight on—fight till doomsday if need be.

SIGISMUND. And.... Estrella?

BOGDAN. Alive and well. A ministering angel founding hospitals and orphanages wherever we go.

SIGISMUND. How... how did you find me?

BOGDAN. We captured one of Klotalski's men, and after an hour of friendly torture he decided to tell us where they were hiding you.

SIGISMUND. Where is Klotalski?

BOGDAN. The devil knows. All I know is that the man is alive and hatching more plots against us.

SIGISMUND. And I?

BOGDAN. And you, my lord?

SIGISMUND. I was banished?

BOGDAN. Drugged, paralyzed, and cruelly banished. Why do you ask? Has your sleep made you forget?

SIGISMUND. And I must be and have again what I was almost glad I dreamed?

BOGDAN. O my prince, our sudden appearance has shaken you. But *that* will not last once you are free again. Soldiers! Hack off our commander's chain! We'll preserve it as our holy relic!

*(The convicts go to work on the chain. Layla rushes forward and tries indignantly to push them away)*

ONE OF THE CONVICTS. Out of our way, slave!

ANOTHER. Or I'll split your heathen skull!

SIGISMUND. Don't hurt her or I'll murder you!

BOGDAN. Gently, men, gently.

THE THIRD. I'll hold the Turk while you two split the chain.

SIGISMUND. Don't struggle, Layla.

BOGDAN. At it, men, at it! O my prince! I am wildly elated! Allow me to kiss your hand!

*(As he grasps Sigismund's hand, one of the convicts gasps, points wildly, and before he can speak a volley of musket shots rings out. Crying out, Bogdan, the convicts, and Layla fall dead around Sigismund, who is still holding Bogdan's hand. Sigismund, petrified, is soaked in blood. Presently the king and Klotalski appear at the head of a band of soldiers)*

KING. Hand in hand with the traitor!

KLOTALSKI. And the chain nearly hacked off.

A SOLDIER. We got them all!

SIGISMUND *(dropping Bogdan's hand, with a cry of despair)*. Layla is dead! You killed Layla!

KING. *You* killed her, monster unleashed by Heaven against our unhappy land!

KLOTALSKI. Hold him, you two! And the rest of you—remove the bodies!

*(Sigismund struggles and sobs as the bodies, including that of Layla, are carried off to the rear)*

SIGISMUND. You killed her and you drugged and tricked me!

KING. Oh my son, my son! Blame yourself, not your unhappy father. It is true that your misdeeds were engendered by the crime I committed against you and God when you were born; but they are not absolved for that reason, for they too were freely incurred, they as

much as mine, freely incurred and mountain-high upon your head. The Lord be thanked, we have struck down the chief of the rebels. The sons of our defrauded and murdered noblemen will repossess the lands, and united Poland can once again face its enemies. But you, Sigismund, with tears in my eyes I tell you that you shall remain lifelong in this cave chained to its wall, and sundered forever from the land you wanted to destroy. My father's heart breaks in two as I pronounce the sentence, but the heart of Poland's king beats high. My son, my prince, dear, last hope of my life, we shall not meet again until we both stand naked before the Supreme Judge to render our final account. May He have mercy that day on us both.

*(He advances on Sigismund and embraces him. Exeunt omnes except Sigismund)*

SIGISMUND (*weeping*). You killed her, you killed her.....

*(He staggers into the cave and vanishes from sight. The stage darkens)*

## SCENE SEVEN: ONE MAN OR ANOTHER

*(The long note on the violin, which we heard at the beginning of Scene Three, is sounded again. On the main stage the torches have sputtered out and a morning light is glowing. Layla appears, humming her folk tune through her nose. She takes down some wash hanging on a cord between her cabin and a tree branch. This done, she picks up a broom and sweeps in front of the cave, then to the side, toward her cabin. Sigismund emerges from the cave, dazed and moaning as he squints at the risen sun. The chain makes its din. He half collapses at his table, then, catching sight of the crucifix, he drags himself up to it)*

SIGISMUND *(touching the nails)*. We did it to you, and you do it to us. Do it and do it and do it. Are you grinning at me, Satan-Christ?

*(He picks up a log or a plank as though to smash the crucifix. But suddenly a powerful military drumroll is heard. Bewildered, Sigismund drops his club. Layla, whom he cannot see, listens with a broad smile. The drums grow louder and louder. Suddenly Klotalski appears, sumptuously arrayed, and, beside him, a Hercules of a man in princely dress: the true Astolof. They are followed by a crowd of attendants, one of whom is carrying a large, beautiful box on a cushion. Other attendants carry a covered litter which they set down next to Klotalski. The drums suddenly fall silent)*

KLOTALSKI. Hail Prince Sigismund, heir to the throne of Poland!  
SOLDIERS ET AL. Long live Prince Sigismund!

*(Klotalski opens the box and takes a large key from it. He advances toward Sigismund, kneels before him, kisses his hand, and unlocks the chain, which two attendants then throw wide of Sigismund)*

KLOTALSKI. At last! Sigismund is free! Free to ascend the throne! Free to be Poland's shield and sword! Sigismund: greet your king and father!



*(The king now emerges from the litter. Overcome with emotion, he remains at a distance from Sigismund)*

KING. My son, my son.... Look at me.... Sigismund... I am your father.... Your old father the king.... I love you.... I have come to take you home.... Have pity on me.... I made mistakes.... but.... but I meant well for our poor country.... Your mother died giving you birth.... We were frightened.... Terrible omens appeared.... But everything will be explained.... You will forgive us.... It's I who made Baron Klotalski care for you.... And now you are free forever.... The throne is waiting for you.... My strong, handsome boy!... Look, here to welcome you is our ally, your cousin the Tsarevich—

*(Layla has now advanced in order to do obeisance to Sigismund)*

SIGISMUND *(wildly)*. Layla! Layla! *(He clutches the kneeling Layla's head in his two hands)* I dreamed, Layla! I dreamed, and dreamed that I dreamed!

KLOTALSKI *(indignant)*. Sigismund, your father—Prince Astolof—!

*(The king takes a few steps toward Sigismund)*

KING. My son, leave your childishness. This is no dream, by Christ! Woman, move out of the way.

*(Layla crawls to one side. The king advances again, with open arms)*

KING. There is my son! My warrior! Poland is calling you and crying “Draw your sword! Fall on our enemies!” Their blood, their evil blood—

SIGISMUND *(with a violent gesture and a howl)*. No more blood! No more blood!

*(He rushes into the forest behind the cave)*

KING. Sigismund! What are you doing? Come back!

ASTOLOF. What—?

KLOTALSKI. Soldiers, after him!

A SOLDIER. Yes, sir. Men! Let's go!

KING. Stop! I am leading you!

KLOTALSKI. What are you thinking of, your highness!

ASTOLOF. The soldiers will find him, sire.

*(Both try to hold the king)*

KING. Release me! What's dignity to me? That child is mine!  
Soldiers, after me!

*(He rushes away with the soldiers)*

ASTOLOF. What a strange scene! The prince seemed utterly terrified.  
Of what, Klotalski? Of some sort of dream? I am never terrified.

KLOTALSKI. Whatever it means, Prince Astolof, rest assured that he  
will not go far. My men know the terrain. He does not. Trust me.

ASTOLOF. But what about this creature? Who is she? Why was he  
raving and clutching her?

KLOTALSKI. Come here, Layla. She's mute, Tsarevich. Layla, tell  
me, what happened? I can usually understand her.

*(Layla makes noises of bewilderment and grief)*

KLOTALSKI. She doesn't know.

ASTOLOF. I presume that she has been the prince's servant here.

KLOTALSKI. For many years. Calm yourself, woman. Your master  
was a little startled, that's all, as who wouldn't have been in his place.  
But we'll find him for you. And wait till you see your reward!  
Something a *little* better than what Prince Astolof's farmgirl took  
home.

ASTOLOF *(laughing)*. Klotalski, you'll be teasing me to your dying  
day.

KLOTALSKI. Go on, Layla, make the place fit for your sovereigns.

*(Layla takes up her broom disconsolately)*

ASTOLOF. As for being startled, I don't know. I have been startled in my time. I was startled now, Klotalski. But I long to hold him in my arms. Estrella my loving wife, Sigismund my cousin, neighbors in Europe, he a giant, I another—who could stand up to us? Not the Turks, not the Swedes, nor that bandit Opalinski whom we'll bleed like a Christmas pig when we catch him.

*(A clamor off-stage. Astolof grasps Klotalski)*

ASTOLOF. What do you think?

KLOTALSKI. They've caught him of course!

*(Layla clasps her hands)*

KLOTALSKI. Didn't I tell you, Prince?

ASTOLOF. Well, I *am* breathing a little easier. Shall we go meet them?

KLOTALSKI. No. Let us wait here; here, on this spot, this place to which pilgrimages will be made. Mark my prophetic words! For our Polish people this grot, this womb, this birth-place will become a shrine.

ASTOLOF. I hope so. I truly hope so. And I shall be distinctly sorry if he refuses.

KLOTALSKI. Refuses what, my lord?

ASTOLOF. Refuses.

*(At first Klotalski fails to understand)*

KLOTALSKI. Never! Never on earth! Believe me, Prince, I raised him to be a conqueror, a lion!

*(Astolof puts his arm around Klotalski's shoulders)*

ASTOLOF. Calm yourself, my friend. *I* am here, and I stand by Poland, no matter what happens. Let me teach you this lesson:

History does not stop. It never wants for capable hands. If not Sigismund, then Astolof. If not Astolof, then the next man.

*(Enter a soldier, running)*

SOLDIER. Here they come! Holding the prince between them!

ASTOLOF. Beat the drums!

*(Mighty drumroll)*

KLOTALSKI. My heart pounds against my ribs.... Sigismund, O Sigismund, think of your country!

*(Sigismund appears, haggard, held between the king and an officer. Layla is near him. Sigismund and Astolof stare at each other across the space)*

ASTOLOF *(in a ringing voice)*. One man or another!

*(Kettledrum rising to a violent climax, and blackout)*

**THE END**

# Agamemnon Triumphant

*A play in ten scenes*

Though bribes were heap'd on bribes, in numbers more  
Than dust in fields, or sands along the shore;  
Should all these offers for my friendship call;  
'Tis he that offers, and I scorn them all.

Pope's *Iliad*, Book IX

Du hast nicht oft  
Zu solcher edlen Tat Gelegenheit.

Goethe, *Iphigenie auf Taurus*, V, 6

## Foreword

Unlike the other three plays in this volume, *Agamemnon Triumphant* is not the reimagination of another theatrical work; its sources are obviously the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*, handled here with the same freedom which Greek dramatists permitted themselves when they made poetry out of their tribal legends. Agamemnon is treated with some contempt in the *Iliad*. He enjoys more respect in the *Odyssey* (one more reason to believe that the two epics were created by different bards). In my play he becomes a redeemed hero, to his own pleased surprise, I hope, if he hears the news while wandering in the Elysian fields.

Telling a good story when one plucks it from Greek legend is not difficult. Finding the proper idiom is. I faced this problem when, many years ago, I wrote *The Summoning of Philoctetes* (or its first version, *Island*), and now I grappled with it again, trying to dodge with equal effort the pompous Scylla of thee-and-thou diction and the vulgar Charybdis of our fast-food American. On either side of a thin line vast quicksands lie in wait, and the author is the last to know whether they have swallowed him or he is safe.

## **Characters**

Agamemnon

Achilles

Briseis

Diomedes

Odysseus

Patroclus

Dolon

Soldiers

Zeus

Thetis

The First Figure: War

The Second Figure: Revenge

The Third Figure

## SCENE ONE

*(In Achilles' shelter. An altar in one corner. Night. By a dim light we see Achilles, Patroclus and Briseis. Achilles wears his sword)*

BRISEIS. How can I, when I see you so somber, so unlike yourself?

ACHILLES. Sing, I tell you, sing of consolations....

BRISEIS. I'll try, my dear *(She sings)*.

Bridegroom, exult! Just as you prayed,  
The rites are done and you are married.  
The girl, just as you prayed, is yours—

*(She stops)*

BRISEIS. I can't sing, Achilles. Tell me what happened. Tell your Briseis, the woman who knows all your secrets. Patroclus, ask him for me.

ACHILLES. Better for you not to know.

PATROCLUS. Tell her, my friend. Let her be warned, let her be prepared....

BRISEIS. Oh God, it's something too terrible....

*(Silence)*

ACHILLES. They want to steal you from me.

BRISEIS. Why? Why?

ACHILLES. I rose in the Assembly. A newcomer to the siege, but the strongest, with ships and men nearly as many as his, and fresh, rested, eager. I had the right. And I was the only man not cowed by big Agamemnon. Why have the winds been dead for a month and not a sack of barley, not a barrel of wine delivered to the troops? Why are the supply ships rooted in Aulis, unable to set sail? Nobody dared speak up but I. Not Aias, not Diomedes, not even old Nestor—it seems



a man is never too old to be afraid to die. Dead silence. And Calchas too, pale as milk. Soothsayers also know when to keep their tongues on a leash. It was the scared look he gave me that maddened me. I cut through the crowd of trembling heroes and took him by the throat—

PATROCLUS. Shook him like an olive tree ripe for harvesting!

ACHILLES. “Dog,” I said, “you are a priest, a seer, a man who reads the guts of sheep and the flight of birds, the gods protect you and yet you daren’t tell us what we all know that you know.” And all that time I see Agamemnon stiffen as I speak. “Tell us!” I yell, “tell *him*!”

PATROCLUS. Not a word!

ACHILLES. So at last it was I who had to say what there was to say. “You, Agamemnon, yes you! Lecher! Worse than your brother and his Helen! You kicked away the high priest of Apollo who came begging you for the daughter you had dragged from the temple like a brawling rapist. And the man cursed you; you and all the Argives. And Apollo heard him. Speak, Calchas, or I’ll throttle you!” I pushed him to the tribune. “It’s true, my lord,” he brings out at last; “have pity on me”—his knees knocking together. Well, I had shamed one of them at last. Nestor moved his grey-bearded bulk towards his mighty majesty. “Let the girl go, my lord,” he said as low as possible; “send her home to her father, send rich gifts, tripods, golden drinking bowls, beautifully woven cloth for Apollo’s altar; and then may the angry god have mercy on us and send the ships a fair Western wind.” Silence again. Agamemnon looked at the crowd and read their faces. And he stared at me when he spoke. “I will do as you say, wise Nestor, for you are my friend. But you, Achilles, rash ill-judging man, latecomer to our war, you have a desirable captive—”

BRISEIS (*moaning*). Stop....

ACHILLES. “Who will warm my bed when the other one is gone.”

BRISEIS. You will let him? You, Achilles?

ACHILLES. “You dare!” I cried; and I did touch the pommel of my sword, whereupon I was pelted with cries from all sides. No, Briseis, I shall not let them touch you. But give me time to think. Do we sail home? Or do we beat him down? “Come the next full moon,” he said, “I’ll send the priest’s daughter home with generous gifts; and then”—

giving me a thundering look—"your own darling—"

PATROCLUS (*suddenly*). Who is out there?

(*The tent is flung open. Agamemnon enters with five soldiers*)

AGAMEMNON (*to the soldiers*). Go!

(*They seize Briseis and the unarmed Patroclus. Achilles draws his sword. Two soldiers hold him off with spears*)

AGAMEMNON. Drop your sword, Achilles, if you care for your friends.

PATROCLUS. Let him kill me, Achilles! Do what you can!

ACHILLES. In good time. (*He contemptuously throws his sword to the ground*)

AGAMEMNON (*to one of the soldiers*). Take her to my shelter. The next full moon is too far off, comrade.

BRISEIS. Scum! Achilles will throw you to the dogs!

SOLDIER. Shut your mouth, woman.

(*He drags her off sobbing*)

ACHILLES. You have her now, Agamemnon. For the moment. But mark my words. Briseis is mine. No slave, but my honored woman and my bride to be when I am home again, and that, I think, will be soon. Dare not, tyrant of Mycenae, approach her nearer than a sword's length. Remember who I am.

AGAMEMNON. Windy talk from a bully. Until I ship the priest's daughter home to him, one night I'll saddle her, and the other your favorite. And if she doesn't suit me, I'll throw her to one of *them* (*pointing to the soldiers*).

ACHILLES. You must be drunk, or else some god has stolen your wits. What will you do here without me? Hector laughs at you and your foolish brother. I see not so much as a stone missing from Troy's

walls. Without myself, Patroclus, and my Myrmidons, you'll rot here until even the vultures won't want to look at you.

AGAMEMNON. That's as the gods will decide. In the meantime, Achilles, remember that *I* am the king. Keep your place. Don't bellow in the Assembly because you have more muscle than I, or because your men are fresh and ours are tired. If you have something to say, speak to me in private. (*To the soldiers, pointing at Patroclus*) Let him go. Patroclus, you're not a hothead like your master. Instruct him in the rules. Rules are not to be violated unless I say so. Farewell. (*As he leaves*) The commanders meet tomorrow at dawn, Achilles. Be there. We want to give you instructions about the use of your fresh soldiers.

ACHILLES. My fresh soldiers will sit in their tents unless you undo this hour's work and bow low before me into the dust where you belong.

AGAMEMNON. You are wanted, Achilles, but not needed. Stay, leave, do as you please. (*To the soldiers*) You. Follow me.

*(He and the soldiers leave)*

PATROCLUS. I was unarmed, Achilles.

ACHILLES. I know.

PATROCLUS. What will you do? Speak to me. Your face is on fire. Remember, we have three thousand men.

ACHILLES. They have five times that number. And I am not a Titan.

PATROCLUS. What are you saying, Achilles? Surely we're not sailing home like frightened minnows! And leaving Briseis to him!

ACHILLES. Calm yourself. Be patient. I may not, must not be as rash as that feeble bully. Our ships are safely anchored at the far end of the line; and we, at any rate, have what's needful to feed ourselves. Beginning tomorrow we shall drill the troops every morning, and after drill the men will roll dice, run races along the beach, sing ballads, and gaze at the Hellenes and Trojans slashing at each other in the distance. We shall allow Agamemnon to bleed until it dawns on him that here, here stands a king above his kingship.

PATROCLUS. In it and yet not in it. You know best.

ACHILLES. I do know best. Go speak to the officers. Reassure them about what happened here. No demoralizing ideas. You understand me.

PATROCLUS. Perfectly.

ACHILLES. And prepare them for active inaction.

PATROCLUS. I will.

ACHILLES. Good night, Patroclus, and thanks.

PATROCLUS. I wish I could have done more. Good night. (*He leaves*)

*(Stillness. Achilles goes to the altar and raises his arms to it until a light begins to glow from it)*

ACHILLES (*softly*). Mother! Goddess! Thetis! Rise from the sea!

*(Thetis appears. Achilles kneels to her and embraces her knees. She strokes his head throughout)*

THETIS. O my son. I feel the blow, I feel it deep in my undying heart.

ACHILLES. Has Zeus begun to hate me, mother? Would any prayer of mine or yours be made in vain?

THETIS. Not so. Tell me your prayer, that I may wind it in mine.

ACHILLES. You know it already.

THETIS. I do. Speak it aloud, so it becomes a thing and has weight.

ACHILLES. May Agamemnon and all the Argives who stand by him be trampled into the dust by Priam's sons, until he makes amends to me, and more.

THETIS. This I will cry for, until the god of gods satisfies us.

ACHILLES. Do it, mother, since my hatred needs you, do it.

THETIS. I will do it, Achilles my son, weep no more, my child.

*(The light dims and she vanishes)*

## SCENE TWO

*(Zeus on his throne. Flanking him, the grim Figures of War and Revenge. Before him, Thetis as suppliant)*

ZEUS. Again this deafening noise of quarrels. Those animals! Agamemnon hates his too glorious rival and steals his concubine. Factions rend each other. The enemy rejoices. Complaints rise to my ears. Then the contraption turns around. Factions tear the enemy apart. The enemy's enemy rejoice. The opposite complaints belabor me. Miserable brood, cosmic blunder! Elsewhere the elements burst, bubble, seep, mix and transmute without dinning petitions into my ears. But here I am again, drawn by these dim-witted creatures (*pointing at the two Figures*) whose enslaved commander I am and who bark their claims at me. Now moreover you, Thetis, you who copulated with a mortal. Why?

THETIS. Because you made me, my lord. You gave me to King Peleus. I struggled. But you had decided.

ZEUS. I forget why. One day these scandals will cease. As for Achilles—

THETIS. Glorious Achilles, giant of the earth, insulted like a brat by godless Agamemnon—

ZEUS. I know, I know. How many times must I hear the noisy story? Why are you here, Nereid of the green sea?

THETIS. He is my son and your beloved, he who destroyed Lesbos and Colophon and Smyrna and Clazomenae and Lyrnessus.

ZEUS. Yes yes.

THETIS. And whom the Fates have chosen to capture Troy.

ZEUS. Leave the Fates to me, little Thetis; do not overstep the line.

THETIS. And now you allow him to weep in his tent, bereft of his bride, disarmed, dishonored. Be just, my father, restore my son and punish the Argives. May Hector who worships you decimate them!

ZEUS. Let the twosome speak. (*Turning to the Second Figure*) You, blood for blood and hatred for hatred everlasting in your crew.

SECOND FIGURE. Do as she demands, Zeus of the Thunder.

ZEUS (*to the First Figure*). And you, lover of warfare?

FIRST FIGURE. Do as she demands, Zeus of the Thunder.

THETIS. Your answer, father, your answer?

*(Zeus reflects)*

THETIS. You nodded, father.

ZEUS. Little daughter, you asked, and I consent. The Argives will be punished.

THETIS. Blessed be your name!

### SCENE THREE

*(Evening in Agamemnon's tent. Present are Agamemnon, Diomedes and Odysseus. Here too there is an altar)*

DIOMEDES. They say that a goddess is his mother.

AGAMEMNON. They say, they say!

ODYSSEUS. What does the man do all day in his quarters? Brood? Is that an occupation for Achilles?

DIOMEDES. Patroclus tells me—

AGAMEMNON. You meet with Patroclus, Diomedes?

DIOMEDES. Have I not told you?

AGAMEMNON. So you have....

DIOMEDES. On the sly, to be sure. After sundown. Patroclus is unhappy. With us (*looking hard at Agamemnon*) naturally—but also with his master. “Let him choose” says he to me in a whisper; “either sail home or else make peace with you and fight.” But of course the man will do neither until he’s—well—

AGAMEMNON. Avenged.

DIOMEDES. Satisfied.

AGAMEMNON. And in the meantime?

DIOMEDES. He drills his men, keeps his ships neat and ready for anything, rolls dice with Patroclus, rumor has it he even composes ballads—love ballads, Agamemnon; I would laugh if it weren't sinister.

ODYSSEUS. I've heard a rumor more sinister than that one.

AGAMEMNON. Namely?

ODYSSEUS. The enemy seems to know.

AGAMEMNON. Know what?

ODYSSEUS. All about Achilles. Achilles and you. In short, Achilles removing himself.

AGAMEMNON. That is not surprising. If we have informers, so have they. They are no more stupid than we are.

DIOMEDES. Listen to me, Agamemnon.

AGAMEMNON. What?

DIOMEDES. The winds became favorable again for us. Supplies came in. So did a few more seaworthy ships. But none of this should blind us. We'll never starve out the Trojans. Truth is, their bellies are as full as ours. We can't be in all places at once to control them. We haven't enough ships and fighters, and thanks to you we've lost—

AGAMEMNON. We must try harder.

DIOMEDES. *You* talk to him, Odysseus.

ODYSSEUS. We believe they will try to break out of the city; and do it soon.

DIOMEDES. It's their great chance, you see.

ODYSSEUS. With Achilles out of the way, Hector is ready for a do or die onslaught. He'll open the gates wide one overcast night and try to overwhelm us, and especially set fire to our ships.

AGAMEMNON. That makes no sense.

ODYSSEUS. How not?

AGAMEMNON. Why would he try to prevent us from scrambling back into the sea and be gone forever?

DIOMEDES (*to Odysseus*). There I'm with Agamemnon. What makes you think—

ODYSSEUS. One of my lads has a cousin in Troy. Sometimes they talk quietly at night through a slit in the wall, like Pyramus and Thisbe. Mind you, the information that passes can be treacherous—on either side. Still, this much is believable—that Hector wants to set fire to a dozen of our ships, just enough to put the idea into a soldier's brain that he'd better embark and be off before they are all reduced to cinders; yet not so many, on the other hand, that the drowsing lion out there will become excited.

AGAMEMNON. Complicated strategy....

ODYSSEUS. And all this—

DIOMEDES. Over a girl, damn it.

AGAMEMNON. Damn *you*! Now I see what these tales of doom and disaster are aiming at!

ODYSSEUS and DIOMEDES. Not—



AGAMEMNON. Have we turned into babies because Achilles sings love ditties in his tent? Have I lost my skills or my wits? Have you two gone flabby? And what of my brother? What of Aias whose one finger is stronger than Hector's two hands? And Tlepolemos of Rhodes, who towers above us all and whose father was Heracles?

DIOMEDES. For each of us the Trojans have one of theirs.

AGAMEMNON. Not equal to us! As for Achilles, hear me out. He'll never fondle his Briseis again! Not, that is, until he crawls back to me on his knees and makes his voice as small as a child's.

ODYSSEUS. You have not touched the girl, Agamemnon?

AGAMEMNON. What business is that of yours? Who commands here?

ODYSSEUS. Listen. Two beggars were quarreling over a loaf of bread. They brought the case before a judge. One claimed that he alone had found the loaf in an abandoned basket. The other, who had seized the loaf, argued that his opponent owed him money and therefore he had a right to the loaf. The judge decided in favor of the first claimant. "Sue for the money," he said to the creditor; "but the loaf cannot be alienated from the man who found it." And he ordered the loser to surrender it. "Too late," was the reply; "I ate it."

AGAMEMNON. Good night, comrades. I shall sleep, or wake, tonight with whomever I please. Give me your hands. Till tomorrow morning. The usual meeting.

*(Exeunt Odysseus and Diomedes. Agamemnon sits brooding for awhile, then claps his hands. A soldier appears)*

SOLDIER. Sir?

AGAMEMNON. Bring in the girl Briseis.

SOLDIER. Briseis?

AGAMEMNON (*angry*). You heard me!

*(Exit the soldier. Agamemnon paces up and down the tent. He pours himself some wine and drinks it)*

AGAMEMNON (*to himself*). At night, the lamp out, who cares? Some are fat, some are thin, that's all.

*(The soldier brings Briseis into the tent, then, at a sign from Agamemnon, leaves again)*

AGAMEMNON. Beautiful, graceful daughter of King Eëtion. Agamemnon welcomes you. Here is a silver cup of wine for you. Sit beside me.

*(Briseis takes the cup and flings it to the ground)*

AGAMEMNON. I like that. Hot blood. But presently I will stifle your anger under my weight.

BRISEIS. You would dare, would you?

AGAMEMNON. What would a man not dare to possess a girl like you?

BRISEIS. Dare the vengeance of Achilles?

AGAMEMNON. Even that. Achilles is a man, and I am a man.

BRISEIS. And so is the buffoon Thersites. You are not worth the strap on Achilles' shield, Agamemnon son of Atreus. Achilles is my lord, my lover, my husband and my avenger.

AGAMEMNON. Lovelier than ever! Yet, say what you will, little Briseis is nothing but Achilles' slave and concubine. And soon, that of a better man.

BRISEIS. A better man! Is it you, Agamemnon, who conquered Cilicia?

AGAMEMNON. Is it I who killed your father there? No. Your lover did. Are you not ashamed to enjoy his kisses naked in bed?

BRISEIS. Achilles killed my father in fair combat, weapon against weapon. He spared my mother and my seven brothers. He gave my father the king a hero's burial. And myself, yes, he took me as booty, yet *he* did not force himself on me. He loved me, courted me, and won my consent.

AGAMEMNON. Your next experience will be different.

BRISEIS. As the gods decide. Beware.

AGAMEMNON. The gods are on my side, woman.

BRISEIS. Beware Achilles is what I meant. If the heavens do not smite you, Achilles will. But what am I saying? It's Hector, Hector who'll run his sword through your belly, because without my Achilles you're nothing.

AGAMEMNON. The more you taunt me, the more delectable you look, and the sharper my appetite. We shall see who is the greatest man here. *(He claps his hands again)* Philacos!

*(Enter the soldier)*

AGAMEMNON. Have the women make the girl ready for me. And then come back.

SOLDIER. Don't struggle, girl.

BRISEIS. I am not struggling. Hands off. I know the way. I shall live to spit on your grave, Agamemnon.

*(Exeunt Briseis and the soldier. Agamemnon drinks more wine, falls into a deep study, then rises and kneels at the altar)*

AGAMEMNON. Mighty Poseidon, ruler of the life-giving sea that girds our land, you who have stood by us in the past, intercede with your lord and brother. Beg Zeus not to turn his face from us. Is he incensed against me? Have I offended him? Oh, I know that what I have dared to do deserves some blame. Thousands of good soldiers suffer, and will suffer worse, because I am proud. But is it not my right, indeed my duty, to be proud? Is anarchy preferable? And what is soft leadership if not anarchy? Furthermore, is it not decreed since the beginning of time that Troy will fall and perish in its rubble? But when and how? Under Agamemnon or another, better man? Inscrutable decrees! But now, now that I have stretched the bow to the breaking point, shall I not speed the arrow home to its target? And yet...temerity you admire; but rashness—in a king! *(low)* rashness you despise and

punish. I humbly need a sign, Zeus; oh give me a sign!... Nothing.... A man must be a lamp onto himself.

*(He broods in silence. Enter Dolon. The two men speak in low voices)*

AGAMEMNON. Dolon!

DOLON. Ready to report, my lord.

AGAMEMNON. Welcome. Sit down. Here is wine.

DOLON. Thank you. Ah, I needed that.

AGAMEMNON. I can imagine.

DOLON. It wasn't easy.

AGAMEMNON. I'm listening.

DOLON. By the looks of it, the Trojans are mustering for a serious assault. More than serious, my lord. Decisive, they say. I'm also told that someone already informed Odysseus. Ask him. Apparently their priests are telling the fools that victory is sure, now that Achilles—you know what. They're assembling in the squares, every last man carrying weapons like quills on a porcupine. All the streets that descend to the Skaian gate have been cleared of stalls and rubbish for quick passage.

AGAMEMNON. Anything else?

DOLON. I don't think so. My informer whispered "Guard the ships"—that's all he had time to say. I heard him clearly enough, but I can't see what they want with our ships.

AGAMEMNON. Every wisp of intelligence counts. Anything else?

DOLON. Nothing else.

AGAMEMNON. Thanks, Dolon. *(He goes to a coffer and pays him)*  
Well done, as usual.

DOLON. Thank you, my lord. Any time, call me.

*(Exit Dolon. Enter the soldier)*

SOLDIER. I was waiting outside, sir. *(With a toss of the head)*. She's ready for you, sir, and quiet. Shall I light your way?

*(Agamemnon hesitates)*

AGAMEMNON. No need to.

SOLDIER. You'll go alone, sir?

AGAMEMNON. Don't question me, soldier. Go to bed.

SOLDIER. Yes, sir.

*(Exit the soldier. Agamemnon sits in silence)*

AGAMEMNON. Rashness they despise and punish....

## SCENE FOUR

*(Achilles' tent at night. Patroclus, showing battlefield dirt on face, hands and clothes, is eating ravenously, watched by Achilles)*

PATROCLUS *(eating, drinking and talking at the same time)*. And finally there was no stopping them. Even though Hector had been thrown to the ground. A huge stone against his shoulder. Aias threw it. But now Aias and his men were standing on the decks, fighting off the rascals with pikes, swords, stones, hatchets, planks, whatever came to hand. Sarpedon the Lycian was savaging our ranks like a lion feasting on sheep. Their archers were shooting arrows standing on top of their chariots safe in the rear. Helmets, shields, weapons rolled on the ground; hundreds of our men lay in their blood, many of them crying out at friend and foe alike not to be trampled to death, and only the dead ones rested from the uproar, the din, the moans and groans that must have risen to the gods in heaven.

ACHILLES. I could hear it from where I stood—not in heaven, but in hell on earth.

PATROCLUS. How can you bear to hear it and not bestir yourself? Offspring of ice! You had no mother!

ACHILLES. Let them be glad I didn't stab at them from behind. What happened next?

PATROCLUS. Suddenly torches appeared. I could see one in Hector's own hand, another in Aeneas's, a third in Sarpedon's.

ACHILLES. The leaders wanted the honor, of course.

PATROCLUS. An even more terrible roar went up. The first ship began to burn. Then the second.

ACHILLES. I saw the black smoke.

PATROCLUS. I began to yell. "Where are Agamemnon and Menelaus? Where is Diomedes? Where is Odysseus? Where is the other Aias? Where are all the damned heroes?" The answer came from Eurypilos who came running to me, grimly wounded though he was. "They are all hurt," he cries out, "hurt or dead, I don't know which!" I became wild.

ACHILLES (*suddenly*). Show me your sword! (*Patroclus complies*) I thought as much.

PATROCLUS. I forgot to obey you. I forgot to stand aside. I plunged in and fought. Are you surprised? I killed Sarpedon.

ACHILLES. Well done. All the same, I had given you an absolute order—

PATROCLUS. Hear me, Achilles. I killed him after he stabbed to death—dare I tell you?—your friend and host in Rhodes—

ACHILLES. Tlepolemos!

PATROCLUS. Yes. (*He watches Achilles*) Not a word? Not a tear? Gone too are Orsilochos, Crethon, Asaios, Dolops—and many more I know nothing of. I see that's nothing to you. As for tomorrow morning, if Zeus continues angry, or asleep—I daren't dwell on what may happen. The men have gone crazy thinking that every last one of the ships will burn and there will be no escape for them. While you sit there, tearless, stubborn, evil-minded, instead of rousing our men to battle, you who could scatter an army by only standing on a mound and giving a mighty shout.

ACHILLES. Finish your meal, Patroclus, because guests are expected.

PATROCLUS. Guests? Now? At this hour of the night?

ACHILLES. Inventive Odysseus and rough Diomedes.

PATROCLUS. Was I misinformed? Aren't they wounded after all?

ACHILLES. They are, they are. But the herald came and told me that in spite of pain they must see me in secret. Listen! That was the signal. (*He goes to the tent's opening. Grimly*) A splendid painting dominated by red! And outlined in crimson they painfully come.

PATROCLUS. Achilles, friend, master, benefactor: yield, don't stiffen your heart!

ACHILLES. Greetings, my friends. Come into warmth and safety.

(*Enter Odysseus and Diomedes, wounded*)

DIOMEDES. Thanks and good evening to you.

ODYSSEUS. You were expecting us, were you not?

ACHILLES. I was. Eurybates told me you were coming. I see that you

are in pain. Sit. (*He claps his hands. A soldier brings in fruit and more wine*) Take whatever your bodies need. No—let me serve you. You carry your wounds with the pride they deserve. Patroclus, rest.

DIOMEDES. Patroclus! Here is my left hand.

ODYSSEUS. And both of mine are alive and well to give you thanks. You fought like—like one not far behind Achilles in strength. And killed Sarpedon for us. (*To Achilles*) All of us Hellenes owe you a debt of gratitude for sending him to us. And how we needed him!

PATROCLUS. Eat and drink, comrades.

ACHILLES. Indeed, you should be resting on your own cots instead of roaming at night to seek out your friends—resting and praying to Hera and Athene to restore you in time for tomorrow's battle.

ODYSSEUS. Hera and Athene be praised, there will be no battle tomorrow.

PATROCLUS. Something new!

ACHILLES. May I be told how this came about?

ODYSSEUS. It came about as follows. After we finally held off the Trojans, and night was falling, Polydamas—

ACHILLES. Who is he?

DIOMEDES. A half-brother of Hector, as prudent as the other one is tough.

ODYSSEUS. Bless him! He talked Hector into falling back across the stream in order to catch his breath and give the troops some sleep. And then Helenus their priest joined with our own good Calchas to demand a ten-day truce to bury the dead with solemn rites and sacrifices, and time to tend the wounded on both sides.

DIOMEDES. In short, they intend to pick up their bodies and retreat into the city.

ACHILLES. Retreat into the city! Are they insane? After setting fire to half a dozen of your ships?

DIOMEDES. No more insane than you, Achilles. They took terrible losses, and now they want time to dispatch emissaries to Thrace.

ACHILLES. For help. I remember. They were promised help.

DIOMEDES. Which they need as sorely as we do.

ODYSSEUS. Because they understand that seeing our fleet in danger,



you sent Patroclus and are about to come in yourself.

DIOMEDES. And that, of course, is what brings us here tonight.

ACHILLES. Speak freely; you are among friends.

ODYSSEUS. Agamemnon repents.

ACHILLES. Of?

DIOMEDES. His mistake.

ACHILLES. His crime.

ODYSSEUS. He understands that he misused his authority.

ACHILLES. Misfortune sharpens a man's perceptions.

DIOMEDES. He has not touched the daughter of Briseus.

ODYSSEUS. As you will be able to have her confirm.

ACHILLES. How so?

DIOMEDES. Because he wishes to send her back to you.

ACHILLES. A noble thief, who drops his loot as he runs from the constable.

ODYSSEUS. Much more will be coming to you, Achilles.

ACHILLES. Namely?

ODYSSEUS. When Troy is taken—by you, by us—for surely it is decreed that it will be taken—and we march on Priam's treasure-house, Agamemnon will hold us back and form us in a half circle, while you, Achilles, alone, or with Patroclus at your side, cross the threshold, and choose for yourself and your Myrmidons whatever has been heaped up for centuries by the Dardanians: gold, silver, bronze, jewels, crowns, tripods, cauldrons, vessels of every description, beyond what even the kingdom of Egypt can boast of. Choose whatever you like and bring it proudly to your father, long may he live and take pride in you, Peleus king of Phthia—all of it, to the last bauble if you wish, or else allotting to the rest of us what you judge to be fitting. But there is more. Go then to the palace grounds where the captive women will be held, and pick for yourself and your henchmen twenty-four of the youngest and most beautiful, even Helen! for Menelaus yields her to you, albeit with a groan. Furthermore, Agamemnon and Nestor will give you, near Pylos, seven citadels, Kardamyle, Enope, Hire, Pherai, Antheia, Aipeia, and Pedasos, controlling land, some rich in cattle-bearing meadows, some in rifts of

ore, some in generous vineyards, where you will be honored as a god, you and your sons, and the sons of these sons. Apollo himself, who killed many of us when we landed in the Troad, would have relented for half these gifts. Therefore you too be satisfied and relent. Excessive pride betokens a tyrant; moderation becomes a hero.

*(Silence. Patroclus looks anxiously at Achilles)*

ACHILLES. Grim indeed is the outlook, O my friends, if such bribes are slipped into my fist. Therefore take this back to Agamemnon king of Mycenae. The lands and the citadels that he and Nestor offer me I could take from them by force if my own dear country did not suffice me. The women, if I desired others than my Briseis, would fall to me at the nod of my crested helmet. Priam's treasures, were I greedy, I who am content drinking my wine from an earthen bowl, I could tear out of your hands, because I am Achilles. On your tablet of gifts I have not seen the gift I want.

DIOMEDES. What can that be other than our deaths?

ACHILLES. May you live forever, comrades! But let King Agamemnon call the princes to the Assembly, and there let him, with his right hand, place the royal scepter of command into mine and fall on his knees before me swearing an oath of loyalty and obedience as a mere prince among princes. Then I shall lead your armies, kill Hector, breach the walls, and put an end to Troy forever. The other gifts, excepting the return of Briseis, are his and yours to keep. I do not need them. Poor I came, and poor I shall return to my fatherland, poor fatherland, devoid of cattle, iron and vineyards and rich only in hard stones and proud men.

DIOMEDES. Proud peacock! Before long, Zeus will pluck your feathers!

ACHILLES. And in conclusion, tell Agamemnon this: yield, or else employ the ten days of lucky truce to load your remaining ships and make ready the sails that scoop up the wind and the oars that beat the harsh-minded sea. To permit his own royal ship to raise anchor, I demand only the woman he stole from me, or else he perishes before

his foot strikes the deck.

*(Silence)*

ODYSSEUS. We shall faithfully deliver to him every word you have spoken.

ACHILLES. Do so. If he demurs, I think that only one resource is left to the Argives.

ODYSSEUS. And what is that?

ACHILLES. Your brain, brilliant Odysseus.

ODYSSEUS. I shall supplicate it for help, mighty Achilles. Farewell.

*(Odysseus and Diomedes leave)*

## SCENE FIVE

*(Zeus on his throne, flanked by the two Figures. Thetis as suppliant)*

THETIS. But he deserves to be king of kings!

ZEUS. King over Agamemnon, my child?

THETIS. And why not over Agamemnon? Is he not the better fighter and the nobler man? Is he not the son of a goddess? He demanded what was his due.

ZEUS. So they all shout in that world of yours. They all deserve to sit *here*, do they not, flinging my thunderbolts and inhaling the perfume of hecatombs sacrificed below in their honor. He demanded what was his due! Why have I come again? You call me, and I return.

THETIS. We are your humble instruments, my lord.

ZEUS. Which you force into my hands! *(To the two Figures)* You and you, speak up, you know it all, arrogant slaves! *(The Second Figure is silent)*. So. This one is mute. Revenge is happy, fulfilled. *(To the First Figure)* And you, lover of war and ruin?

FIRST FIGURE. You have gone too far, son of Kronos. Who is this little goddess who sports with a few dolphins in the sea? Shall Hector the Trojan become king of Argos, Mycenae and Sparta? Will Hellas speak Asian? Have you forgotten your immutable decrees? Enough! Your pampered Nereid has received satisfaction. The small wheel inside the big wheel has spun out its spin. With Achilles or without, the final hammer is raised, and will strike. Dismiss her.

ZEUS *(to the Second Figure)*. Your turn. Speak.

SECOND FIGURE. I am content.

*(Zeus stares at Thetis, who lowers her head)*

ZEUS. You are my beloved child, Thetis. But begone.

## SCENE SIX

*(In Agamemnon's tent. Agamemnon, Odysseus and Diomedes)*

ODYSSEUS. It came to me in that half-dreaming, half-waking state when our thoughts run loose in the mind, and sometimes, as if by chance, knit into an interesting design. Yet surely this time they were guided not by chance but by the gods.

AGAMEMNON. To the point, Odysseus!

DIOMEDES. No. Let him tell his wonderful story step by step; you will like it.

ODYSSEUS. At first I was merely dreaming a remembrance—how, as I lay wounded on my cot, Idomeneus sat at my side, gave me water to drink, and told me other men's adventures of the day in order to distract me from my pain. And in my dream there came back with especial force his mirthful account of huge Aias who, as the Trojans approached his ship, sent a soldier down to the hold to gather up the javelins kept there in storage. The door stuck fast. Three soldiers couldn't pry it loose. So Aias himself came running down, and butted his helmeted head against the door, which flew open at the blow. I heard Idomeneus laugh again in my dream, and call Aias "bull-headed". Now, still dozing and dreaming, and repeating these words to myself in Idomeneus' voice, an image sprung into my brain, of a scene I witnessed long ago in Ithaca: a furious bull battering down a fence and almost killing two of my farmhands. Suddenly, by Athena's will, the fence, into which a little gate was set, became in my brain the massive Skaian gate of Troy. A huge bull-head, made of wood and snouted in iron, went crashing through the gate. And I woke up, dazzled, holding on to that vision as if for the breath of life.

AGAMEMNON. What do you mean? This huge bull-head made out of wood —

DIOMEDES. Explain, Odysseus, explain. Our leader thinks he's dreaming now!

ODYSSEUS. No, no; the dream is over. A squad of sturdy men, real

as my fist, will climb Mount Ida and chop down its thickest, straightest tree. Working behind cover, for there are spies among us, they will cap it in iron, suspend it by halyards from a roof in a wagon, set the wagon on a dozen strong wheels, hide the contraption until the truce is over, and that same night wheel it close to the gate.

DIOMEDES. And from there—(*he makes a crashing sound*)

AGAMEMNON. Won't the sentinels make it out in the dark, sound the alarm and fling down fire and pitch before it can act?

ODYSSEUS. Its house will be gabled and covered. Our bull will be neither burnt nor pierced. And the alarm will come too late. Thirty or forty men will swing the mast to and fro until, with a mighty slam, it will break the gate and let the rest of us in. And then! The story ends.

DIOMEDES. Well, Agamemnon, what do you say to that? Let Achilles sulk till he rots! We'll be rushing through that tunnel in the wall, three to one against them.

AGAMEMNON. Draw it for me, Odysseus. Here's a piece of charcoal, draw it on the table.

ODYSSEUS. At your service. Front and side. A rude sketch.

DIOMEDES. Rude? It seems to move already!

AGAMEMNON. I see. And here, I suppose, go the ropes.

ODYSSEUS. Exactly. But I had better erase my masterpiece. Secrecy is essential.

AGAMEMNON. Is it? I don't know. Let me think. Amazing Odysseus! And yet, how can such work be done by a squad of soldiers, even picked ones, in the seven days of the truce that remain?

ODYSSEUS. Difficult but not impossible.

AGAMEMNON. Why take the risk? No. Have two hundred men—everybody!—work at your wooden beast. Make them hammer and saw in broad daylight. Secrets are found out, so no secrets. Let the Trojans know that Agamemnon had a vision. In expiation for his misdeeds, he must burn a gigantic wooden bull as an offering to the gods close to the city walls. The only secret—and here, Odysseus, we'll call on those picked men of yours—will concern those cables. They will be prepared on the sly, and be affixed where they belong on the last night, at the last moment. Then only will the truth appear. Too late for *them*.

DIOMEDES. Is this a good idea, Odysseus?

ODYSSEUS. A capital idea. Furthermore, Agamemnon, I take it as an omen. When the gods give a man wisdom, he knows that they have returned to his side.

AGAMEMNON. May you be as good a prophet as you are a dreamer! (*In high good humor*) Men! I feel a vision coming on! Go, while I summon Calchas. A vision requires a priest.

## SCENE SEVEN

*(Achilles' shelter. It is empty for a few moments; then, in haste, enter Patroclus followed by a soldier)*

PATROCLUS. Drunk? Achilles drunk? You're raving! Where is he?

SOLDIER. I swear to you!

PATROCLUS. What happened?

SOLDIER. While you were gone for news, and never seemed to come back, people were running in every direction, shouting this and that, rumors, facts, miracles never seen since the world was created. Of course we could see the smoke rising from the city. Finally we stopped a mule-driver who looked reliable because he didn't seem to care. He told us about the Skaian gate battered open, the—

PATROCLUS *(impatient)*. I know all that. But where in God's name is Achilles?

SOLDIER. Where should a man be when he's drunk? You'll find him on his cot. Go in and see for yourself.

PATROCLUS. Go in yourself. At once! Get him up and out! It's urgent, and yet I don't want him to see me looking at him lying drunk on his bed. Go, go!

*(The soldier leaves; Patroclus paces nervously)*

PATROCLUS *(to himself)*. Hurry, hurry! *(He looks outside and groans)* Oh my God! Is it too late?

*(He turns to face Achilles, who totters in, holding a large bowl and singing)*

ACHILLES.           Hail! Hail! Hail!  
                          Homebound we sail,  
                          Loaded with rubies and pearls,  
                          Fat oxen and slender girls!



Greetings Patroclus, greetings Agamemnon, greetings you—what's your name?

SOLDIER. Arcas, sir, whom you promoted two—

ACHILLES. Did you hear the news, my boy? They whittled an Achilles out of a tree and threw it at the Skaian gate! Hail, hail, hail!

PATROCLUS. Achilles! Take hold of yourself! Every minute counts!

ACHILLES. What do you want? Can't you see I'm busy celebrating?

PATROCLUS. Throw away that bowl, Achilles! Don't waste a second! Lead the troops, join the Argives in the attack while there's still time!

ACHILLES. What? What? Repeat what you said!

PATROCLUS. I'm begging you to join in while there's still work to be done, before it's too late, before they reach the citadel and we're left here in our tents like drunken idiots! Give me the bowl!

*(He tries to wrest it from Achilles, who violently pushes him back)*

ACHILLES. The idiot is yourself! Advice fit for a lickspittle, a clown in the market-place! *(He throws the bowl away but draws his sword)* Get out! Both of you! Out of my sight!

*(Patroclus and the soldier flee. Achilles collapses)*

ACHILLES *(picking himself up)*. Mother, are you listening? I wish a vulture had ripped your womb open and eaten my flesh before I was born! Where are your promises? Liar! Whore! *(He sobs wildly)*

## SCENE EIGHT

*(Agamemnon, battle-scarred, standing on the rubble of Troy. Trumpets sound)*

AGAMEMNON. Lords of Hellas! Welcome at this hour of our triumph. We have done at last what we came here to do. Down is the proud nation that dared to challenge us for the rule of the earth. But while the defeated are at rest forever, the victors must labor on, and must do so, I admonish you, in obedience to the laws of Zeus. First then, let us bury the dead on both sides without pride of place or denigration of the annihilated foe. Above all, let Priam and his sons receive the honors which are their due, even as we weep over our own many heroes fallen in battle. Some of you stood at my side when Hector, struck by twenty arrows, fell at his father's feet. You saw white-bearded Priam, threatening with a useless sword, shed his last tear when I, Agamemnon, lord of Mycenae, more in pity than in wrath, slew him so he could fall over Hector's body. Let these dead be honored, not desecrated. Next, let the women and children—the widows and orphans—be bound and led out of the city. Assembled in our encampment below, they will receive gentle and honorable treatment before they are allotted in just proportion and quality to the number of soldiers each of you has brought to the siege, except for Odysseus, to whom, as the genius of our victory, a double share of slaves and treasures will be assigned. Next, allow no looting! Looters are to be executed on the very spot where they are caught. Every man will receive his share. Hence every man who loots is guilty of robbing his comrades. Let the treasures be brought before my shelter in the open plain, so that, under every man's scrutiny, every soldier and every chieftain who fought with us in this final battle will be satisfied when he embarks for home. My share will be the same as every commander's; equal among equals in my reward as I have been, I hope, in merit. When the sharing is completed, I shall appoint a governor over this new Troy, one who will rebuild the city and make of it our own eternal guardian of the Hellespont. Many of our brave soldiers have already declared their wish to take Trojan wives and

settle in this place, so rich, so tragic in their minds. However this may be, the children of Troy must not be separated from their mothers. I will not allow it. As for Troy itself, its fallen stones shall rise again, the citadel on which we stand shall command the Troad once more, while the rest of us, victorious and serene, sail home at long last, to the arms of our fathers, our mothers, our wives and our children, and inspire the bards to sing to the end of time the story of our great conquest of Asia. Now, comrades and allies, let us disperse. There's hard work to be done till nightfall. We are to meet late this night at the altar of Zeus in our camp, where we shall offer holocausts of oxen, sheep and rams in thanksgiving, feast to our heart's content and further deliberate. Lords and friends: I am no long-winded talker; my speech is finished. Go, betake yourselves to your several duties.

*(Trumpets sound again. Agamemnon leaves. The place is empty for awhile. Silence. Then, enter Diomedes)*

DIOMEDES (*calling*). Odysseus! Let me talk to you.

ODYSSEUS (*off-stage*). Coming!

*(Enter Odysseus)*

DIOMEDES. I saw you climb to the top of the tower, or what's left of it, but hadn't a chance to ask you what you saw out there.

ODYSSEUS. Lucky I came down again without twisting both ankles or breaking my neck. What I saw? Well, I can tell you that he hasn't moved. I could see a puff of smoke, the kind that suggests dinner being cooked. Why do you look disappointed?

DIOMEDES. I expected—

ODYSSEUS. I didn't. Shameful it may be to be present and witness it all; but doubly shameful to swim away as if ashamed.

DIOMEDES. Still—

ODYSSEUS. Shall I tell you something else?

DIOMEDES. You had better!

ODYSSEUS. Agamemnon intends to summon Achilles—

DIOMEDES. Summon!

ODYSSEUS. Invite Achilles to his shelter tomorrow.

DIOMEDES. Really! That will be a spectacle for the immortals!

ODYSSEUS. Also for us humble mortals; because you and I, who were Agamemnon's ambassadors, will be asked to attend.

DIOMEDES. For this, I'd be willing to give up my share of the booty, and empty my own coffers besides! I want to hear him beg, "Please, please, Agamemnon, allow me to plant a parting kiss on Briseis' honeyed lips"!

ODYSSEUS. Keep your imagination sober, my friend. Come, enough of that. We'll talk again tonight.

DIOMEDES. And drink till dawn!

## SCENE NINE

*(Agamenon's shelter. Enter Agamemnon and Odysseus. Agamemnon seats himself on a chair that has been raised upon a platform)*

ODYSSEUS. The dead are gone towards oblivion under the tough earth. Already, I could swear, the ruins of the city are showing an expectancy of stones put back in place, houses occupied once more, gardens reseeded, new children eager to lose their innocence. Our newly won gains—the luxuries of Asian Troy and its women—seem already absorbed into our ancient possessions and cozily at home with us. Our vessels rock at anchor like horses of the sea impatient for departure. I shall leave the plains of Troy happy in the knowledge that I have served you well to the best of my powers. Now, however, we play out the epilogue, as in the mummeries our poets put on once a year in the courtyards of Ithaca. Achilles comes. He has nothing. He is nothing. But this nothing is strong, proud and dangerous. Think of the fangs of a desperate lion. Diomedes and I are here to stand by you should your words and your greatness enrage him.

AGAMEMNON. That greatness, Odysseus, such as it is, owes its sap and marrow to you. May I perish if ever I allow your glory to be forgotten or diminished. Come next spring, I hope you will cross the slender arm of the sea that separates your Ithaca from our Peloponnese, and be my honored guest, mine and Clytemnestra's, in my palace at Mycenae. No slave-girl but she herself will joyfully fill your golden goblet with Arcadian wine. But here comes Diomedes.

*(Enter Diomedes)*

DIOMEDES. Friends, the man is approaching, with no one but Patroclus at his side and neither one armed. Your men are making a hedge on either side of them, without uttering a sound. A strange, silent progress. Take my advice, Agamemnon, and that of Odysseus too: don't spare the rogue; treat him as he deserves.

AGAMEMNON. Stand at my side, brave Diomedes. Leave everything

to me.

*(Diomedes and Odysseus are now flanking Agamemnon as Achilles and Patroclus enter, the latter remaining discreetly in the background)*

AGAMEMNON. Greetings, Achilles, and welcome. And a kind welcome to you, Patroclus, as always.

*(Patroclus bows)*

ACHILLES. I have accepted your invitation, Agamemnon, first of all in order to salute your impressive victory and to convey my high, unenvious admiration. And second, in order to take my leave without rancor. We shall not meet again this side of the Elysian Fields. I sail to my fatherland tomorrow, bereft of my bride and my honor. Glorious my past, inglorious my present, dim my future. Long ago it was foretold to my mother that I should either die young but covered with glory at Troy, or live out a long but obscure life in my father's small kingdom. It appears that the gods have decided. Zeus, who they say detests injustice and punishes it, has turned his face away from me, scorning my just cause and nodding you to victory. Who am I to guess the reason why? When Zeus chooses to be cruel, who dares to scold him?

DIOMEDES. Arrogant towards us to the bitter end, Achilles, blind to your own faults, and offensive to the gods.

ODYSSEUS. Will you not remember that we came to you contrite, offered you far more than mere compensation; but you would have none of it and sent us contemptuously out of your presence.

DIOMEDES. To go die by the thousands at the foot of the city.

ACHILLES. Venomous words. Serpents hissing at me, at me who could still, unarmed as I am, crush you, though your hands are touching your swords, as easily as a schoolboy cracks a nut. Enough. Your turn, Agamemnon. Do not spare me either. *(A long pause)* Why so silent?

AGAMEMNON. Whom and what the gods love and hate, Achilles, I

know no better than you. They speak shining words one hour, and clouded ones the next. They send thunder, and flights of birds, and other omens, and no man can tell what they truly and deeply mean. Our soothsayers claim they can read the mind of Zeus, and not long ago I thought I could do so as well, above all because I am a king, a great man in this little world of ours. Yet in the end, Achilles, I know only my own mind, that strange, turbulent universe enclosed in a box of bone. The light that shines there is not so brilliant as I should like it to be; but it suffices, I hope and pray, to guide my hand. By that light, my friend, I perceive that I wronged you with a gross injury. I insulted you. Unprovoked, blind with rage, I tore what was dearest to you out of your hands. Then came a mean and false remorse, when I sent these two stalwarts to your tent to plead with you and offer restitution with great additions of cattle, land, women, gold. Humility and repentance wrung from me when Hector was setting our ships on fire and breaking our spirits, until it became urgent to crawl to you for help. You did right to lock the gates of your soul to me. Perhaps in your anger you went too far, but that fault vanishes in mine. Now, in this solemn hour of triumph, when nothing mean and false whispers counsels into my ear, my mind urges me to return Briseis to you, unharmed, and furthermore to load you, as the ally I called into this war, with gifts that will honor you when you greet your dear father. A hero you came, a hero you shall part from me.

*(Achilles is thunderstruck. Finally comprehending, he opens his arms to Agamemnon, who now descends from his chair)*

ACHILLES (*softly*). My brother! My better than myself! My lord! How you humble me....

*(They embrace)*

AGAMEMNON. Give me your hand, and let me lead you to Briseis who knows that you have come to take her away.

*(Exeunt)*

*(Astonished silence)*

ODYSSEUS. Am I awake or did I dream what just happened?

DIOMEDES. The man has gone mad, mad I say, mad. Patroclus, you're our friend and his alike. Am I not right?

PATROCLUS. I don't know what to say. I am glad for Achilles, and, I confess, for myself as well; yet I too feel as though I were dreaming.

ODYSSEUS. Loaded with gifts! And the rest of us ignored, swept aside, spurned! So be it. Tomorrow I sail. I have bloody work waiting for me in Ithaca, and will not delay another day. Give me your hands. Diomedes, Patroclus, companions entrenched in my heart. No other farewells.



## SCENE TEN

*(Zeus on his throne. The two Figures stand before him)*

ZEUS. When? How? Who? Speak one at a time, imps of disaster.

FIRST FIGURE. What disaster, my lord? All is hushed. We roamed quietly over the city, picking at the rubble, noted here and there a house or a temple lopsided yet standing—

SECOND FIGURE. Saw the first colonizers begin to arrive and displace the dead. Well done, we sang, new blood appears, the old is gone—

FIRST FIGURE. Gone and not gone: much of it still sopping the walls, blood on the kitchen utensils, the steps of the bathhouses, the altars—

SECOND FIGURE. Well done, we sang, no laziness here.

FIRST FIGURE. The rain began to fall, and everything became grey; dogs lapped up the water in the gutters; water seeped from the broken culverts.

SECOND FIGURE. A few wizened natives were left. The new people pushed them into the raw weather. Out, Trojans, out!

FIRST FIGURE. We heard a baby wailing somewhere between two walls—

SECOND FIGURE. And then, satisfied that your will had been done, my lord, we left the city by the great gash that had been the gate. A quiet scene, my lord, missing the uproar of armies, the clatter of helmets and swords, the yells of pain and victory.

FIRST FIGURE. We hovered over the plain, gazing at its crop of weapons, wheels, pieces of chariots, carcasses of horses, dogs gnawing at them, and leftovers of Argive tents and campfires.

SECOND FIGURE. And that is where—

FIRST FIGURE. Hard by Agamemnon's shelter, my lord; we must be precise.

SECOND FIGURE. We perceived the shape, the thing in white we spoke of at the start —

FIRST FIGURE. That wouldn't answer our questions, nor flee from us when we threatened it, and how we snarled! but shamelessly followed us when we decided to ignore it and look for you—

SECOND FIGURE. Knowing you had come, and required our presence, ever dutiful to you—

FIRST FIGURE. Ever at your feet, my lord.

ZEUS. Good. (*He seems to listen*) Stand aside. Crouch. Farther away.

BOTH FIGURES. As you wish, master.

ZEUS. Give me silence so it can enter. It is looking for me.

*(When the Third Figure enters, white-clad and veiled, it pauses before Zeus with its back to us. Zeus slowly rises—for the first time—moves to the Figure and lifts its veil)*

ZEUS. Welcome on earth.

FIRST FIGURE. No welcome. Sweep it away, Zeus.

SECOND FIGURE. The earth is fine as it is.

ZEUS. I gaze at you with love, foreboding, sadness and invincible hope. Give me your hands.

THE TWO FIGURES. Who is it, Zeus? Speak to us. What is it?

ZEUS. That is not for you to know.

## THE END

## Notes

(1) In the first scene, Briseis sings a few lines Guy Davenport has allowed me to take from his translation of Sappho 116. I hope it is unnecessary to say that songs like Sappho's have been sung since the beginning of human time.

(2) My Greeks are called Argives, as in Homer, and sometimes Hellenes; but in production a director might be wise to drop the Argives and call them Greeks.

(3) Except for Aias, I use the Greek or Latin names as they are commonly written and spoken in English, sometimes ending in -os and sometimes in -us. The reason for making Aias the exception is a bit comical, and, I hope, temporary. "Ajax" is so well known as a cleansing powder for kitchens and bathrooms that it has become difficult to apply the name to an heroic warrior. As soon as this inconvenient association vanishes, the hero's better-known name can be returned to him in print and production.

(4) It is essential that Zeus remain seated on his throne whenever we see him, until he rises at the end of the play, so that this rising will play to full effect.

(5) The Figures of War and Revenge can be made to look and sound as grim and monstrous as the producer and director shall desire. After the last line of the play, as the lights gradually dim (or as the curtain slowly falls) they are to remain motionless and show no change of expression. They are not cowed, not defeated, simply, as before, puzzled and irritated.

(6) A suggestion for the finale: the Third Figure in a pool of light.

(7) Music can be applied throughout the play. But aside from requiring the trumpets to sound in Scene 8, I have kept the text clear of musical commands, as I have kept "psychological" stage directions, which I dislike, to a strict minimum.

# The Fall of Numantia

*A play in seven scenes  
concerning the Roman invasions of Spain*

Ser, nada más. Y basta.

*Jorge Guillén*

Remember, a live dog is better than a dead lion.

*Ecclesiastes*

## Foreword

*The Fall of Numantia* is a broadly and deeply revised version of *General Audax*, a play printed originally in *First Stage: a Quarterly of New Drama*, and then as the first of the twelve works in my two-volume *Collected Plays*. The basic source for it is Cervantes' odd masterpiece *La Numancia*, whose patriotic fervor for Spain rings out as vehemently as Shakespeare's does for England in *Henry V*:

Qué envidia, qué temor, España amada,  
te tendrán mil naciones extranjeras,  
en quien tu reñiras tu aguda espada  
y tenderás triunfando tus banderas!

What envy and fear, beloved Spain, you shall spread among a thousand foreign nations, where you shall make war with your sharp sword and unfold your triumphant banners! For the Romans had conquered Spain, but where was Rome now? In the dust, at the mercy of "il segundo Felipe, sin segundo"—the second Philip, without second.

The exaltations of Cervantes' optimistic tragedy (*Numantia* dies but its spirit soars forever) inspired me to write a kind of anti-*Numancia*. It is possible that the story of Josephus' defection to Rome in a later war helped form my original conception.

Since the fall of *Numantia* is a well-attested historical event, a few words about it will probably be of interest, although I wish to stress that Cervantes' play and my counter-play are fully intelligible without any preambulatory information. In the third century BC the Carthaginians and Romans were battling each other over possession of the Iberian peninsula. The Romans won, but their conquest remained an uneasy one right down to the time of Caesar Augustus, for the Spanish tribes kept rising, resisting and rebelling (Napoleon was to discover even more painfully that Spaniards are hard to tame). These wars are described in the Sixth Book of Appian's *Roman History*, which I remember acquiring in the Loeb edition and studying with good results.

Appian pays particular attention to the resistance and fall of the strongly fortified town of *Numantia*. "With only 8000 fighting men before the war began, how many and what terrible reverses did they bring upon the Romans!... How often did they challenge to open battle the last general sent against them, who had invested them with an army of 60,000 men!"

This last general was the obliterater of Carthage, Publius Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus Africanus, who could be trusted to succeed where ten years' worth of predecessors had failed. Scipio, instead of accepting desperate challenges to open battle, built a wall and a ditch around the city, and starved it into surrendering in the year 133 BC, whereupon he was granted the additional surname of Numantinus.

So then, the real Numantia surrendered; it did not indulge in mass suicide, as reported by Cervantes and in my own play. According to Appian, when the Numantians ran out of food, "they boiled and ate the bodies of human beings.... They were rendered savage in mind by their food, and their bodies were reduced to the semblance of wild beasts by famine, plague, long hair and neglect." Eventually, "those who wished to do so killed themselves in various ways." But the others gave up. "They smelled most horribly, and the clothes they wore were likewise squalid and emitted an equally foul odor." As was the custom, they were sold into slavery—presumably after being washed and fed.

However, according to Appian, two mass suicides had in fact occurred in Spain three quarters of a century before the fall of Numantia, namely at Saguntum on the eastern coast and in a place he calls Astapa. Here is his account of the end of the latter town. "The inhabitants foresaw that, if they were captured by the Romans, they would be reduced to slavery. Accordingly they brought all their valuables into the marketplace, piled wood around them, and put their wives and children on the heap. They made fifty of their principal men take an oath that whenever they should see that the city must fall, they would kill the women and the children, set fire to the pile, and slay themselves thereon." All this happened, no one was left alive, the Romans achieved "a barren victory," and their leader (a lieutenant of the earlier great Scipio Africanus) was left full of "admiration for the bravery of the Astapians."

The stories of Saguntum, Astapa and Numantia were easily confused or conflated; but in any case, Numantia was certainly demolished, and its ruins can still be viewed in the neighborhood of Soria, midway between Madrid and San Sebastián.

## Characters

### *Numantians:*

Retogenes, *Governor of Numantia.*

Caravino, *Vice-Governor.*

Audax, *General of the Numantian Army.*

Connoba, *his son.*

Marandro, *a merchant.*

Julia, *sister-in-law of Audax.*

Lira, *a friend of the family.*

Marcius, *a citizen.*

Prisoners, soldiers, citizens, gravediggers.

### *Romans:*

Publius Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus, *Consul and General of the Army.*

Maximus, *his brother.*

Buteo, *his nephew.*

Polybius, *historian and officer attached to Scipio.*

Minucius, *in command of Scipio's private guard.*

Mummius, *a slave on an Italian estate.*

Officers and soldiers.

## SCENE ONE: A ROMAN GARDEN

*(A villa in the Italian countryside. Night-time and moonlight. A portico, a garden, a fountain, a few trees, shrubbery and flowers. Marandro, an old man, is sitting quietly at a table under the portico, lit by a single candle. He is examining a ledger and other documents, occasionally picking at a grape from a bowl which has been placed on another low table within reach. A deeply peaceful scene. A slave, Mummius, enters quietly from within the house. He sets another bowl of fruit on the low table)*

MUMMIUS. Excuse me, sir.

MARANDRO. Mummius.

MUMMIUS. Yes, sir.

MARANDRO. It's so dark where you stand, I can only see your voice.  
*(He chuckles)*

MUMMIUS. Shall I set another light on the table, sir?

MARANDRO. No no.

MUMMIUS. My master has asked me to bring you more refreshments and to inquire whether you have any other wishes.

MARANDRO. I don't wish anything else. I've t-t-told you, you can all go to sleep. I know the way to my rooms. But why hasn't old Audax come yet?

MUMMIUS. He's our only night watchman, sir, and also he's a bit slow on his legs these days.

MARANDRO. But he's sure to come?

MUMMIUS. Absolutely sure, sir. You'll hear the jingling of the keys and him I'll bet humming one of his Spanish ditties.

MARANDRO. Spanish ditties.... Who'd believe it?... And you're sure it's Audax?

MUMMIUS. Oh yes, sir. We're very good friends, so of course I know. He tells us stories about his glorious days in Numantia, how he led the war against Rome, and how he made Scipio himself tremble.

MARANDRO. Hmm.



MUMMIUS. Sometimes we don't believe a word of it. A decayed night watchman in Italy that was a Spanish general sitting at table with governors and ladies —prove it, we say, and he goes all red in the face.

MARANDRO. It fits.

MUMMIUS. Excuse me for asking, sir, but is that where you're from, Numantia?

MARANDRO. Yes, that's where I was when the Romans t-t-took it. And I wasn't eating grapes that day, let me t-t-t-tell you.

MUMMIUS. So it's really true, sir?

MARANDRO. What's really true?

MUMMIUS. His having been the commander and all?

MARANDRO. I don't know, my boy. All I know is that Audax was the name of our commander in chief.

MUMMIUS. Excuse me for asking.

MARANDRO. Well, that's all, Mummus. Go to bed, and tell your master I'll be t-t-t-talking to him after I t-t-tour the estate in the morning.

MUMMIUS. Very good, sir. Good night, sir. *(He leaves)*

*(Marandro sits back again, dreaming. Then he looks at the ledger. His finger marks the place)*

MARANDRO. "Audax. Place of origin: Numantia, Spain. Age: approximately fifty-five." And that was seven years ago. "Purchased in fair health from the tribune Pomponius at Capua" and so on. It figures.... Ah—there he must be.

*(We hear the keys and the humming, as promised, and then Audax appears, old but hale, lit by the lantern he is carrying. He vanishes for a moment, and we hear him securing a door. Then he is seen again)*

MARANDRO. General Audax.

AUDAX. Mummus? Never mind the general. I won that jug, and you'll pay up, young puppy.

*(Marandro rises and shows himself. Audax is surprised)*

AUDAX. Beg your pardon, sir. I didn't know there were guests in the house. Wait—was it you?—did you call me Audax?

MARANDRO. I did. You don't know me, but I know you. Or do you recognize me? Numantia, eighteen years ago.

AUDAX (*with extreme astonishment*). Numantia! (*He lifts the lantern to look at Marandro, whom he inspects close and long*) Were you in the troops? Yes, one of my officers....

MARANDRO. No. I was a merchant. Of course, I only knew you from a distance.

AUDAX. A merchant. And you survived.

MARANDRO. Like you.

AUDAX. Like me?

MARANDRO. Well, not exactly. But I survived.

AUDAX. How did you know I was here?

MARANDRO. I didn't know. I happened to see your name in the ledger of slaves. And I d-d-decided to wait for you and see for myself. Hey! To think I'm t-t-talking to our c-c-commander!

AUDAX. A commander who locks up stables.

MARANDRO. Sit down, old man, sit down beside me. On a chair, by God.

AUDAX (*hesitant*). On a chair?

MARANDRO. That's right. Everybody's asleep in the house. And I don't fuss about etiquette. I'm a b-b-businessman.

AUDAX. All right. But I can't stay long. I'm the night watchman here.

MARANDRO. I know.

AUDAX. What's your name again?

MARANDRO. Marandro.

AUDAX. Marandro. No, I don't think I knew you. How did you manage to save your skin, Marandro?

MARANDRO. Well—to tell you the truth—on the day we found out about you—you know—

AUDAX. Speak up, merchant: on the day I defected, say it and don't quibble.

MARANDRO. Well, on the day you went over, I said to myself, I said, "Marandro, you're not going to die either." So I moved myself to an abandoned shack in a lot, and when people began to k-k-kill themselves like it was the end of the world, and the Romans c-c-came in, I k-k-kept quiet and waited.

AUDAX. And here you are, eighteen years later, a guest on the noble if crumbling estate of Quintus Pompeius Aulus. Look at that silk! My congratulations.

MARANDRO. Come on, old fellow, don't b-b-blame me for my luck. When you're lucky, it means that the gods love you.

AUDAX. Guzzle your luck in peace! I'll kiss the rim of your goblet, I will.

MARANDRO. That's more like it.

AUDAX. You've come here on business? Wait a minute. You're not buying the estate, are you?

MARANDRO. I might be doing just that.

AUDAX (*whistling*). And I'll be your man! (*Confidentially*) Listen, old merchant, don't bid too high on the property. The soil is fair enough, but you can barely see it under the pile of debts.

MARANDRO. The debts are to me.

AUDAX. Triple gods! To you! Marandro, if you buy—what will you do with me?

MARANDRO. Don't worry. You can have your freedom.

AUDAX. Let me kiss your hand. But—instead of freedom—look, why lose a good man like me? The master allows me to live in an old cabin at the edge of the wheat field. Give it to me outright, Marandro, and I'll serve you well. Give it to me in writing—cut my night duty a bit—and also—damn it, I might as well come out with it—don't scatter my family.

MARANDRO. Your family?

AUDAX. Try to understand, Marandro. I'm an old man. The past is past, oh God, the dead are dead.... A man needs a warm place.

MARANDRO. Sure.

AUDAX. So there's a woman under my roof; who do I harm? and two children—not mine—but I don't care. Let me keep them together.

MARANDRO. Don't worry, they're all yours.

AUDAX. May the gods keep prospering you, sir.

MARANDRO. And you too, Audax.

AUDAX. Sure; me too.

MARANDRO. Why not? To each his turn. The way I see it, you've paid heavily enough for your—(*he stops short*)

AUDAX. Treason, Marandro, treason.

MARANDRO. Who said treason?

AUDAX. Nobody.

MARANDRO. I'm a p-p-plain businessman. You didn't rob me, did you? So I don't judge.

AUDAX (*flares up*). But I do. I judge. Audax has sat for eighteen years over Audax: who led an army; who twice defeated the Roman legions; who dared to say No in the end; who accepted the name of coward; who became a slave, and suffered, and wouldn't die. Judge all you like, my friend. There is a courage for which trumpets do not blow.

*(Darkness now covers the scene. Silence, then, very faintly, in the far distance of many years before, a sound of trumpets. The sound gradually increases and turns into a shattering fanfare as the next scene opens)*

## SCENE TWO: SCIPIO

*(Sound of trumpets. Herald's off-stage shout "Scipio Africanus!" Preceded by lictors and flanked by officers, Scipio enters and quickly ascends a wooden tribune)*

SCIPIO. Soldiers, I salute you! Some of you know me. Some of you stood at my side under the walls of Carthage. And some of you broke into Carthage behind me and lived to remember the day. I greet you in the name of Rome, and call you friends. But to the others among you I am only the next general sent down from Rome to roll with you in the Spanish dust. That is why I have come to greet you in particular. Lift up your heads and look at me: Scipio himself is here to take command. Soldiers, in the name of Rome, I salute you!

Men, how long, how bitterly long have you been serving before Numantia? Ten years, many of you! Ten years of fighting or dawdling. Defeats. Stagnation. Though I've just arrived, believe me I know, and what I don't know, I smell. I've been here before. I was fighting in Spain when some of you were in diapers. And now, as I look at a few of you slouching instead of standing smart, I keep those ten years in mind. Also when I see a few dozen whores, and fortune-tellers, and lunatic priests, and when I see card-games, drinking and dicing—some of you are grinning, I notice—well, I keep those ten years in mind too. *(He suddenly slams the railing with his fist)* But the games are finished. Off with the cooks, the flute-players, the priests and the actors! From now on, you'll work the fat off your bellies! You'll stand square in the ranks! Every man here, beginning with myself, every officer that's got two legs with two feet and ten toes, every twitching body will be assigned his job until the job is done. What job? Numantia taken. Taken and occupied. Occupied and colonized. By Roman farmers. You. Your families. Numantia a safe civilized Roman city, and the country a safe civilized Roman country. But for this I need hard bodies and clear minds. Myself, I've come to this camp naked: no servants, no pillows, no ivory tables and no Persian candy; not so much as a bed. I'll be sleeping on a cot and so

will you. Away with the wagons of clothes, the jolly stuffed beds, the beads and trinkets! Instead of pins for your girls you'll play with picks, axes, mattocks and spades. Away with the harlots and the gypsies! Away with glassware and dishes! To each man—officer and private alike, me and you—a pewter cup, a dish and a spoon: period. At nine the camp is asleep. Guards caught napping: off with the left hand. Scipio will snoop and Scipio will poke anywhere anytime. He's not proud. At five, up. Half of you training. The other half digging and building. Yes, digging and building. A trench clean around Numantia except where the river is. Next: a palisade around Numantia. And last: behind the palisade, a stone wall around Numantia: thick, tough and high. Parapets. Towers. Stairs. Architecture! Numantia will starve inside a hoop! Not a drop of Roman or allied blood will be lost! Provided we keep a Roman discipline. Alert twenty-four hours a day. Steady work. Patience. One solid front. Your reward will come when Numantia is in our hands. Yours, I should say: its money, its shops, its cellars: yours. And triple pay in the month of victory! A week of dancing and the rest of it! Let Hell pay the bill! Numantia is yours. And there will be no favorites then, as you will see none now. Where Scipio commands, the great get no favors and the humble suffer no wrongs. You'll not be riding chariots to and from work; but neither will I. You'll have no Lusitanian slaves to wash your bodies; but neither will Scipio. And you'll be spading the dry soil from light to dark; but so will your general: spade in hand you'll see me beside you and puffing with the best of you.

Romans and allies! My grandfather fought and died in Spain. My father campaigned in Spain. Myself, I served in Spain eighteen years ago as prefect to Licinius Lucullus now dead. I have been elsewhere since, you know where. The man who comes from Carthage does not tolerate defeat! In a year Numantia will be ours. Today we outnumber them three to one. Tomorrow more are coming! Four thousand fresh troops—my nephew in charge—another Scipio! Volunteers from every part of our dominions—sent to me Scipio by kings and princes who remember Carthage. Romans and allies, hold onto Discipline, Work and Patience. Under these three hammers Numantia will sink into the floor of the world: and God be with us.

*The Fall of Numantia*

*(He abruptly descends as the trumpets sound once more. Off-stage cries of "Dismiss!")*

### SCENE THREE: THE WAR COUNCIL

*(Numantia. Meeting of the Military Council. Retogenes, Caravino, and Audax around a table. Behind them, a few officers, including Connoba. Maps on the table. Off-stage, the tolling of the death-bell, gradually receding. Caravino has been speaking. His finger is jabbing a map)*

CARAVINO. Here. Is it or isn't it a fact that he has sent half of his seventh legion away to Termantia?

AUDAX. He has. And it is also a fact that half of it remains.

CARAVINO. I have made that calculation too. What of it? Are they supermen? They're men like our own, just as tired, just as hot under the sun.

RETOGENES. So then.

CARAVINO. So then. My plan is simple enough. We send a squad out on the first moonless night, that is to say a week from today. The men swim across at this point here. They scale the cliff. They surprise the enemy on his flank. Meantime we open the Minervan Gate wide—something the enemy never expects.

AUDAX. Because he thinks better of us, perhaps.

CARAVINO. Something the enemy never expects, and we launch a frontal assault smack against him with our fourth, fifth and eighth.

RETOGENES. The casualties would be high.

CARAVINO. They will be high. But twenty-five percent will come back.

RETOGENES. Can we afford it?

CARAVINO. Can we afford anything else? We've got to shake up Pallantia; prove to them we're alive and capable of putting meat into an alliance; what they need to convince them is a show like this one.

AUDAX. A show like this one will bleed us dry.

CARAVINO. I expected nothing else from you, Audax.

RETOGENES. Gentlemen....

AUDAX. It's not blustering over a map will get you through the Roman lines. Retogenes, we are being asked to engineer an idle



massacre of our own best men. I want no part of it. Let this be understood.

RETOGENES. You mean there's no chance for the plan to succeed?

AUDAX. Of course there's a chance. But the chance must be weighed against mischance. You take one in two, one in five, but not one in ten, in twenty! To count on surprising Scipio—that, for example, is lunacy.

CARAVINO. Scipio again!

AUDAX. Yes, Scipio again. This is no amateur you're fighting, my friend. Whether or not he expects us to march out at the great gate to tweak his nose, the point I am making is that one does not surprise Scipio Africanus. One may defeat him in pitched battle, one might buy him off, but one does not plan a campaign which depends on surprising him.

CARAVINO. The invulnerable Scipio! There we have him again. Take it from me, I know where Scipio succeeds. Not in starving our bodies. Good, he has starved our bodies too—you needn't prove it to me, I hear the death-bell and I can smell bodies too; but that's not it. Scipio is starving our wills. Our wills are sick. One against a hundred we used to crack the Roman lines. Now we let them huddle us into the city, we sit down and starve, we grumble and we die, we send peace delegations, we allow, damn it! we allow a Peace Party in our midst: we don't move. One good blow! That's what I demand. Not only to smash through the Roman lines, not only to wake up our spineless allies, but to get our own blood circulating again.

AUDAX. Circulating? You mean flooding the land. Gentlemen, you are both respected administrators, but you are not soldiers. This is not the rostrum, you are not making speeches to our good citizens. The squad you want to send up the cliff will be picked off and killed. Fine. It's their business to die: signed, Audax. But what next? Scipio knows better than to be taken in by a feint. Our men throw their bodies against the wall he's built, or into his trenches. Scipio butchers us with his left hand and laughs at us besides. Now I understand Caravino's intentions: they are good, but they are political. Not good enough to justify a military catastrophe. I'm ordering no frontal attack.

CARAVINO. Here you have it, this is the very flabbiness I spoke about. I allowed the general to have his say.

AUDAX. We'll not be saving Numantia with insults.

CARAVINO. If only Scipio were defending this city instead of attacking it!... This hopelessness, this unwillingness to make sacrifices: there's the true enemy. Audax, I'll say freely that I reject your policy of inaction.

AUDAX. And I reject your policy of reckless action. It makes me mad—ten years of fighting, lives and more lives—the waste—the ruin—the fanatics—and now all I hear is more more more—"no sacrifice is too great," and I see you ready to depopulate the city for the sake of a "policy of action." If you want victory, Caravino, leave us a few people alive to know we've won.

CARAVINO. Are you suggesting that the war is lost, Audax?

AUDAX. Not lost and yet lost, and if not lost, lost anyway.

RETOGENES. *That* is a conundrum you must kindly explain to our lesser minds, general.

AUDAX. I mean, Retogenes, that we might yet win in the legal sense, especially if we are able to suck in Pallantia, Malia, and Lutia. But we cannot win back those ten years. Those are ten defeated years. The dead are dead, the waste is wasted.

RETOGENES. Perhaps you have taken certain personal losses too much to heart.

AUDAX. Your own have been as great as mine, Retogenes; that's not to the purpose.

RETOGENES. Well, you're an elusive sort. You think well, Audax, no man better in this city, but undoubtedly you think too much. However, let's come to some kind of agreement. What do you propose, Audax? Specifically now.

AUDAX. My proposal is far from heroic—or new, for that matter. Scipio still likes money. We've bribed him before. Let's bribe him again. Or accommodate him with a loan, in civil language.

CARAVINO. To make him lift the siege? What?

AUDAX. No such foolishness. But we might be allowed to buy a little food again. Last time he sold us his own—stolen from his men, thank you. That's risky for him; so let's propose that he give safe passage to a single one of our men. Let him allow the man to reach Pallantia, ostensibly to buy food in secret. The supplies can trickle in at night by way of the river, provided the Romans look the other way again. And

then, while our man is in Pallantia, let him demand a full commitment at last.

CARAVINO. Extravagance. Until we prove to Pallantia that we've got muscles—enough to give *them* a few knocks when the day comes—they won't show their anxious faces to the Romans.

AUDAX. Possibly. And yet many of them are saying, like us, that the cities are only waiting to be picked off one by one. We must propose a coordinated attack, rear and front. If the move is carefully prepared, we can open the gate at last and try Caravino's plan. But not without safeguards.

CARAVINO. Safeguards! Safeguards! That's all I hear in the council nowadays. The chimney-sweeps have more courage than some of us.

AUDAX. Then make the chimney-sweeps your generals.

CARAVINO. There are those who think too much of safety, sir.

AUDAX. And others who have reasons of their own perhaps for not caring any more. Let the world collapse with them!

CARAVINO. The meaning of this?

AUDAX. Gladly!

RETOGENES. Gentlemen!

CARAVINO. I'm proud to be on Scipio's blacklist, Audax, and on that honor roll second only to Retogenes, and shame on you, and something more, who knows, for not standing in it.

AUDAX. Call me traitor, say traitor to my face, miserable politician.

RETOGENES. Enough! Silence! Both of you. Now look why Scipio picked one to die and another to escape alive. Here is the fruit. Numantia will tear itself to shreds while Scipio rubs his hands in glee. Caravino, you have gone too far. I must ask you—

CARAVINO. Yes yes—I apologize.

RETOGENES. And you.

AUDAX. Sweep it under. Peace.

RETOGENES. Let's consider your plan, general. I don't see any reason for not trying it out. If it fails, there's still time for other ideas. We'll risk one man—and try to blind Scipio with golden coins over his eyes. Caravino?

CARAVINO. Very well. Try it. I agree.

RETOGENES. Remains the choice of a man to undertake the cold swim in the river at night, the dart through the Roman patrols, the

scratchy climb along the face of the cliff, and the long run to Pallantia; and actually, I can't think of anyone more suitable than our prefect of the second cohort. What do you think, gentlemen? *(He is addressing the officers)*

OFFICER. An excellent choice.

CARAVINO. First-rate.

RETOGENES. General? I can't better express my confidence—

AUDAX. My son is ready. I can speak for him; but let him speak for himself.

CONNOBA. Name the time and give me precise instructions. I'll do the rest.

RETOGENES. Good. We'll reach Scipio through the usual muddy channels, and find out whether he'll dance if we fiddle. Anything else, my friends? If not, I bid you good night. Let me shake your hand, Connoba; and yours, Audax. Remember, all of you: our strength is in our unity. *(He leaves)*

CARAVINO *(as he is leaving with the other men)*. In short, we need a Scipio of our own. Buying artichokes in Pallantia, ha-ha-ha! *(They are gone)*

*(Audax and Connoba are left alone)*

AUDAX. God be with you, my boy, God be with you. They took my breath away. How was I to guess?

CONNOBA. I think we can count on Scipio.

AUDAX. I suppose so. Did you see Caravino grin and pretend to hide it?

CONNOBA. Father—

AUDAX. Yes?

CONNOBA. Don't worry about me.

AUDAX. What else shall I worry about? Your mother died in the first epidemic, your brother was killed three days later....

CONNOBA. Worry about yourself. Your gloomy talk.

AUDAX. Gloomy talk?

CONNOBA. They don't like it. I don't like it.

AUDAX. I understand.

CONNOBA. Well, I'm overdue at the barracks. Equipment to check, orders to give, and all the rest before I go.

AUDAX. Maro will replace you for the few days.

CONNOBA. He'll do.

AUDAX. I'll see you again tonight.

CONNOBA. If you wish. I'm off now.

AUDAX. Connoba . . . One reason is what you know. I swore to your mother I would pester you into safety....

CONNOBA. I'm not a child any more. I have duties. Excuse me—

AUDAX. Go.

*(Connoba leaves. Audax sits down and looks at the maps, his forehead in his hand)*

AUDAX. Twenty years old.... Not even....

## SCENE FOUR: THE PRISONER

*(Scipio's tent. Two bunks, a table, a chest: the minimum. In the darkness before dawn, Scipio, his brother Maximus and Polybius are seated round the table, lit by a small lamp)*

MAXIMUS. We've had them in a vise for eight months and thirteen days, you know. Fourteen counting today.

POLYBIUS. No doubt about it. They are down to licking hides, eating straw, and even boiling limbs of the dead. They chuck people into mass graves. And according to reports, they also talk with extremely noble words about Saguntum.

MAXIMUS. Saguntum?

POLYBIUS. Another Spanish town. Your brother knows. Hannibal besieged it. He too put a ditch and a wall around it, like Publius Scipio.

SCIPIO *(laughing)*. My good Polybius, I'm not a "great originator of strategic maneuvers" and so forth! But it takes something, doesn't it, to choose what to imitate?

POLYBIUS. My respected general, Carthage swallowed Saguntum, but you swallowed Hannibal. That speaks for itself.

MAXIMUS. Tell me what happened at Saguntum.

POLYBIUS. When the fatal hour drew near, the men burned their own city, melted down all valuables, destroyed every sitting and standing object in town, murdered the prisoners, dispatched their own women and children, and then neatly disemboweled themselves.

MAXIMUS. And that's what the Numantians are talking about?

POLYBIUS. So I hear.

SCIPIO. I don't like it. The senate won't like it. I could storm the city right now, but if I do, those fanatics may leave nothing for me to show. Make a strong effort at the next parley, Polybius.

POLYBIUS. I've been making a strong effort for six months, Scipio! What else can I do? Do you have new ideas? Concessions?

SCIPIO. Yes, concessions. I'll guarantee the safety of every man, woman and child in Numantia, except those on the list. And I'll find

new land for them.

POLYBIUS. But that's nothing new. You're talking to Polybius, my dear general, not to your enemies. Come, what *new* proposals have you got?

SCIPIO. I'll reduce the tribute, God blast it!

MAXIMUS. What?

POLYBIUS. You surprise me.

SCIPIO (*red-faced*). You all think I'm a robber, a squeezer, a purse-snatcher! They kick my name about in Rome as though I were a pawnbroker. They send accountants to sniff into my "practices"! And you too, Polybius.

POLYBIUS. I didn't say a thing!

SCIPIO. But you smiled. Well, I say reduce the tribute. Take a twentieth off and let's have peace, by all the thunder in heaven! Rome won't let me do more for them. Talk to them.

POLYBIUS. I'll try, Scipio. You know my feelings.

*(Enter Buteo in haste)*

BUTEO. Uncle!

SCIPIO. What?

BUTEO. A squad of men sent out by Fulvius Flaccus caught someone down by the river.

SCIPIO. Damnation! Polybius—more ideas later this morning—

POLYBIUS. Yes, yes, all in good time. (*Exit*)

SCIPIO. Sit down. Take a breath. Here, drink. Now tell me what happened. (*To Maximus*) Hand me my belt.

BUTEO. Pure luck for us. I was on duty. I noticed a patrol by the river. Recognized them in the dark. Fulvius Flaccus' men, of course.

MAXIMUS. Snooping.

BUTEO. They noticed somebody landing from a skiff on our side of the river.

SCIPIO. Whereabout?

BUTEO. Near Tower Six.

MAXIMUS. Ay!

BUTEO. Their leader cries out "What's this? What's this? Isn't the river supposed to be triple-watched? Stop that man!" And three of

them dive quietly into the brushwork down the embankment. The man fights back, but they disarm and pinion him in a second. That's when I shot away to tell you.

SCIPIO. Go meet them, Buteo. Tell them Scipio's been informed—don't say how—and say I want to see the prisoner at once. Bring him to me yourself before Fulvius gets to him. Quick, quick.

*(Buteo leaves the tent)*

SCIPIO. A nasty turn of the wheel.

MAXIMUS. But are you sure it's the man?

SCIPIO. Tonight was the night, Tower Six was the spot. Who else was it? The ghost of Achilles? And where else would that simpering Fulvius have his men except where there's trouble against me?

MAXIMUS. One of these days—

SCIPIO. And where in blazes is Buteo? Is he giving Fulvius time to make one of his official appearances? *(He looks outside)* They're coming.

MAXIMUS. Brother, listen to me. Maybe it's somebody else. Maybe!

SCIPIO. Shut up.

MAXIMUS. All right, it isn't. What are you going to do?

SCIPIO. We took the money and yet he was captured. He'll be shouting this dirty fact every step of the way.

MAXIMUS. Think, brother.

SCIPIO. A snivelling dandy whose only speech in the Senate has been "Gentlemen, I propose we decorate the vestibule with a painting of Justice and Virtue." Does he think he'll get the better of Scipio?

MAXIMUS. Not likely! Quiet.

*(Enter Buteo and Connoba. Connoba's hands are tied. Buteo throws Connoba's dagger on a table)*

CONNOBA. Which one of you is Scipio?

SCIPIO. One minute. *(Aside to Buteo)* Where's Fulvius?

BUTEO. Still in his tent, but certainly informed by now.

SCIPIO. Of course.

CONNOBA. One of you two is Scipio. Which one is it?



MAXIMUS. Quiet! You'll find out soon enough.

SCIPIO (*still to Buteo*). Go to his tent and tell him I'm questioning the prisoner.

BUTEO. Good. (*Exit*)

SCIPIO. I am Scipio.

CONNOBA. Why am I here? Answer me.

SCIPIO. Your name and rank?

CONNOBA (*draws himself up*). Connoba. Prefect of the second cohort of Numantia.

SCIPIO. Son of?

CONNOBA. A citizen and no concern of yours. Now let me question *you*.

MAXIMUS. Hold your temper, Numantian; remember who it is you're addressing.

CONNOBA. I'm remembering it, Roman; I'll be remembering it as long as I live. Scipio, you've put our money in your pockets. Deny it.

SCIPIO. I don't deny it.

CONNOBA. Why do these Roman hyenas live? Their generals pick-pockets. For this miserable money you were letting me reach Pallantia, God curse you! to beg a few loaves of bread for our children. Didn't you swear? Deny it!

SCIPIO. I don't deny it, Connoba. Calm down. I had my own people down by Tower Six—

CONNOBA. Three of them knocked me to the ground. What's this drivel?

SCIPIO. That was another patrol. One I didn't know about. I have enemies here, Connoba. I'm not almighty.

MAXIMUS. That's the whole story and God's truth.

SCIPIO. We're as shocked as you are, believe me. But don't worry. I'll have you on the road to Pallantia within a day or two.

CONNOBA. Here, untie me for a start.

SCIPIO. Gladly, but in a little while, because I'd better not seem too friendly in the open. Tell me what you said to the men who caught you—what you cried out, or deliberately spoke, or let fall before you could think. Think hard. I truly need to know before I can plan your escape.

CONNOBA. I said nothing, and I didn't "let fall" anything, I'm not a fool. I said and repeated one thing only, loud and clear: "Take me to Scipio."

SCIPIO. Ah, very good.

CONNOBA. Look, Scipio, I'll swallow your story. You just carry out your side of the bargain. Nobody denies your word's always been good—until now.

SCIPIO. Thanks.

*(Enter Buteo, holding a letter)*

SCIPIO. Sit down, my friend, while I talk to this man.

*(He goes to one side with Buteo)*

SCIPIO. Back so soon?

BUTEO. I ran into his messenger. He's written to you.

*(Scipio takes the letter, sits down facing Connoba again, and reads it to himself)*

SCIPIO. This concerns you, my boy. Fulvius Flaccus, our senatorial legate from Rome, will be interrogating you tomorrow morning. He can't today, luckily he's committed to a tour of inspection all day long. *(Confidentially)* Better for both of us if he never makes your acquaintance. I'll post a couple of my own men over your cell and you can handle the rest during the night. The prisoner escaped; sorry! More luck for us, the stockade is on the Pallantia side of our camp.

CONNOBA. Let me warn you, though. You try foul play on me and I won't die I promise without every man in this camp hearing the facts.

SCIPIO. I understand. You have my word, Connoba. Here's a token of my confidence.

*(Scipio slips the dagger into Connoba's clothing, and makes a hush sign on his lips)*

CONNOBA. Thanks. In exchange, I'll keep my mouth shut—as long as it's good for Numantia.

SCIPIO. I like that! Buteo, kindly call in an escort for our guest.

*(Exit Buteo and reentrance with two soldiers)*

SCIPIO *(aside to Connoba)*. Get some sleep, and keep your promise. My enemies are yours. *(To the soldiers)* Make the prisoner comfortable in his cell. Cut him free as soon as you arrive, and see to it that he is given dry clothes, a good meal and decent bedding.

SOLDIERS. Yes, sir.

*(The soldiers lead Connoba out. Scipio watches at the tent opening and then returns, somber)*

MAXIMUS. What will you do with him, brother?

SCIPIO. Why ask? Give me that quill. The senator must be informed that I have taken cognizance of his plan, and that I have already locked up the prisoner. *(He writes hastily and hands the note to Buteo)* Take it to him, then find Minucius and send him to me.

BUTEO *(troubled)*. Minucius?

SCIPIO. Go.

*(Exit Buteo. A long silence)*

SCIPIO. The sun is up.

MAXIMUS. Looks like another warm day. Summer is coming.

*(Another silence)*

SCIPIO. Strutting about the camp with his "mantle of office"! Rome sets a spy on me! On me! I took Carthage for them! They're sitting in their villas lapping their wines while I kill myself in this desert. And they send me a spy; a prig who never saw a spear before except in a museum!

MAXIMUS. I don't recognize you, brother. What's the use of crying? But why don't you let the boy escape tonight just as you told him? I think you should.

SCIPIO. By all the gods in heaven and hell, I wish I could! Listen to this. *(He picks up the letter)* "To allay any fears you may have, or any inconvenience you may suffer, I shall post two trusted sentinels in six-hour shifts alongside yours to keep watch over the stockade from dawn to dawn."

MAXIMUS. Well then, trust the boy to keep his mouth shut.

SCIPIO. You weren't here to see how Fulvius handled the Numantian we caught a few month ago, same as Connoba.

MAXIMUS. Torture?

SCIPIO. Better than that. He told the prisoner, you'll be held in chains till you confess who was bribed to let you pass, and if you refuse, I'll ship you to Rome. Thank heaven I had nothing to do with that one, but it cost Laelius his post, along with a trip back to Rome and—you know what.

MAXIMUS. I remember now.

SCIPIO. Naturally, Fulvius will tell our Connoba that if he confesses, he'll be free to go home, or even allowed to travel on to Pallantia. If not, farewell Numantia, farewell Spain, go rot as a slave in Rome. Why would the boy want to protect me?

MAXIMUS. Damn damn damn.

*(Minucius appears)*

MAXIMUS. Maybe I'd better look for my breakfast. I'll return in awhile.

*(Maximus, glad to leave, makes his way out. Minucius salutes him, then stands in front of Scipio)*

SCIPIO. Trouble at dawn, Minucius.

MINUCIUS. I know, sir. We saw it all.

SCIPIO. Oh.

MINUCIUS. I couldn't see nothing we could do about it, sir. We had no orders. Sure, we could have jumped them. But I said to myself it

wasn't what you'd be wanting us to do, out in the open.

SCIPIO. Right. Tell me what happened exactly.

MINUCIUS. Not much to tell, sir. Me and the other five was on duty at Tower Six. I took my turn about two in the morning, on account of the man you said was supposed to show up about three. About four o'clock sure enough I hear a quiet kind of splash in the river, and the man comes rowing up to the bank. He looks around, and I'm looking at him from the tower—of course he can't see me—and then him and me see the others at the same simultaneous time. A squad of our own men. He tries to get away—

SCIPIO. Fine. I know the rest.

MINUCIUS. I hope we did right, sir.

SCIPIO. You did. You're not to blame for a thing. But now we've got the prisoner on our hands, and there's a nasty job for you.

MINUCIUS. Anything, sir. You know me.

SCIPIO. I do. That's why I called you. But you'll need helpers.

MINUCIUS. Anyone in mind, sir?

SCIPIO. I was thinking of our two Numidians.

MINUCIUS. Mago and Gulussa. Good idea.

SCIPIO. Listen carefully. The prisoner is in the stockade. I'll see to it that the three of you are on duty to guard him from sundown to midnight. You'll bring him his supper, with plenty of wine. Your supper too. You'll all sit down at the same table. Eat, drink, taunt him, insult Numantia, accuse him and them of cowardice, tell him these Iberian tribes are savages, say—

MINUCIUS. Leave it to me, sir.

SCIPIO. He's got a dagger. Pretend you want to take it away from him. Anyway, a brawl. All of you in a rage. Don't forget he's only a boy, and I had a taste of his temper a few minutes ago. Killed in a brawl. Three weeks in the lockup for you and the Numidians. *This* should make it bearable.

*(He opens the chest, takes out a locked box, opens it with a key, and retrieves a bag, which he fills with pieces of gold and gives to Minucius)*

MINUCIUS. Thank you, sir. I don't see no impediment. What next?

*The Fall of Numantia*

SCIPIO. Several of Fulvius Flaccus' men will be on duty nearby. They will overhear the brawling. You'll open the door, all bloody and besmirched, and yell for assistance. An officer will be called who will arrest you and report the disaster to me.

MINUCIUS. Will be done, sir.

SCIPIO. If nobody blabs, you'll share a second one of these. But God help all three of you if anything leaks out—

MINUCIUS. Trust us, sir; we know what's smart and what's dumb.

*(He picks up the bag, hides it in his cloak, salutes and leaves. Scipio remains in deep gloom. Enter Maximus)*

SCIPIO. Are you fed?

MAXIMUS. Not hungry. Well?

SCIPIO. Well? Do you want a speech from me? Fine. Some live, some die, and some die that some may live. Sit down. *(Low)* What we took from the Numantians for the boy. You know where I keep it.

MAXIMUS. Sure.

SCIPIO. Have it returned to them.

## SCENE FIVE: HUNGER

*(A market square in Numantia, bordered by houses and porticos, and backed by a parapet overlooking the country beyond and below. Benches, stalls, a drinking trough for horses, perhaps a monument. The death-bell is heard for a little while. Audax, his back to the audience, gazes out over the ramparts. To one side, by one of the houses, a ragged man sits weakly, head down, on a doorstep. There is a long silence. A second and third man enter and aimlessly join the sitting man. They are pale, ragged, and long-haired)*

SECOND. Still watching his dead soldier lad, as if it was yesterday.

FIRST. Who?

SECOND. The general. Look.

FIRST. I don't know.

SECOND. Did your boy find anything?

FIRST. A dead dog. With flies.

SECOND. You can die eating it, in my opinion.

FIRST. Why?

SECOND. What do you mean—why?

FIRST. Why should I die eating it? The flies don't die.

*(The third man laughs)*

SECOND. Flies don't die so easily.

FIRST. That's what I said.

*(Silence. In the distance, the death-bell)*

SECOND. It's hot again.

THIRD. Day after day. And the smell....

SECOND. The Romans won't be able to take it much longer.

THIRD. Who said?

SECOND. I heard it. Now I think of it, it's what Retogenes said on Sunday.

FIRST. What did he say?

SECOND. "We must persevere, stand firm, and fight on, because the Romans are wilting in the sun." I always like the way he puts things.

FIRST. I wish I could stand up.

SECOND. What would you do?

FIRST. But I get spots before my eyes and I faint.

SECOND. It's a bad sign.

THIRD. Not necessarily.

*(Enter Marandro)*

SECOND. What's the news, Marandro?

MARANDRO. They've arrested the p-p-p-Peace Party leaders.

FIRST. Good. I've seen them. There was grease on their lips. I noticed. Don't tell me they join the Peace Party for nothing. Scipio gives them bread and cheese and wine and then they talk about peace while we're chewing hunks of timber, and my woman is dead sure enough and only one of the boys is left to me.

SECOND. I never saw grease on their lips.

FIRST. You got weak eyes.

THIRD. And you're out of your mind. *(To Marandro)* Are you sure?

MARANDRO. Sure I'm sure. They're all c-c-coming this way, t-t-tied together, Avarus in front. Retogenes will tell us why.

THIRD. Retogenes likes to give us shows.

SECOND. They're coming this way?

MARANDRO. On the way to jail.

SECOND. Another trial, I guess.

THIRD. And more executions. It never fails. It hasn't failed yet.

FIRST. Traitors all of them.

THIRD. You're a damn fool.

FIRST *(a flicker of strength)*. Who? Me?

THIRD. That's right. You.

FIRST *(down again)*. They'll arrest you too.

THIRD. Let them.

MARANDRO. What are you t-t-talking about?

SECOND. What's the good of quarreling? We ought to remain united.



THIRD. United dead in a ditch. If the Romans don't do it, Retogenes and his gang will. I've heard him and Caravino. "Not an infant left in Numantia for Scipio to show off on his next triumph in Rome."

FIRST. Everybody dead. I like that.

MARANDRO (*seeing Audax*). There's Audax! P-p-poor man....

SECOND. Must be hard when a fellow sends his own son off to die.

MARANDRO. I wouldn't p-p-p-put it that way.

THIRD. Why in God's name should they have arrested the Peace Party?

FIRST. Because they've got a bellyful of Roman dinner in them.

THIRD. I'll swear they've had terms from the Romans! And that's why—that's why these politicians will murder them!

SECOND. Terms—I'll say! Give up the city! Move your baggage out! Pay tribute! Settle in the sand two hundred bitter miles away! Not me! Leave my house to the first hooligan that comes and demands it of me? A Roman dog sleeping in my bed? I tell you the hot days have come and they'll rot down to their bones.

THIRD. The hot days have come and you'll be stinking in the grave with the rest of us and the Roman dog will sleep in your bed all the same.

SECOND. You're a maniac! I tell you the hot days are on our side, and in another month we'll be seeing a Pallantian army on the hills. Wait and see.

THIRD. Thank you, say my bones. Five more years of the same.

FIRST. They'll arrest you.

MARANDRO. No no, they won't. Don't t-t-t-talk so much, my friend.

THIRD (*laughing*). It's better than listening to my belly making speeches. Damn, now my eyes are rolling too. (*He leans against a wall and sits down*)

SECOND (*helping him*). Talking uses you up.

MARANDRO. We'll fight together to the b-b-b-bitter end.

*(Enter Lira and Julia)*

MARANDRO (*to Lira*). Good afternoon, madam.

LIRA. Good day, Marandro.

MARANDRO (*to the men*). A fine woman. I used to supply the family with wine. She danced in the chorus with Audax's wife.

SECOND. Isn't the other his sister-in-law?

MARANDRO. I don't know.

FIRST. She'll die anyway.

JULIA. Audax. (*Audax turns around*) What's the use? Don't look....

AUDAX. It's where I saw him for the last time....

JULIA. I know.

AUDAX. I keep saying the same thing, don't I! But I can't take my eyes away. Lira, I'm glad to see you.

LIRA. We wondered if we could help. At your house, perhaps.

AUDAX. Yes—at my house—thank you. Fortunately, I'm on duty day and night. My house.... Julia, what about Marcellus?

JULIA. It will be over soon. My husband today, myself tomorrow.

AUDAX. I'll try to bring some food again after dark.

*(Meanwhile, a number of citizens have appeared. An officer enters and approaches Audax)*

OFFICER. Excuse me, general.

AUDAX. Yes—what is it?

OFFICER. The governor requests that you join him. He is coming this way and the prisoners after him, but he would like to be met and attended.

AUDAX. I'll go meet him. Let him know. (*The officer leaves*) Retogenes is delivering the prisoners to jail in person. But I don't know why he is coming on before them.

LIRA. Roman prisoners? What do you mean?

AUDAX. Oh. You haven't heard. Our own Peace Party is going to jail. It's a wonder Retogenes waited until now.

LIRA. I don't understand.

AUDAX. You're lucky. Well, I have to leave you. I advise you not to stay.

LIRA. Isn't there anything we can do for you?

AUDAX. Yes, of course. Tell the housekeeper I'll come home in two or three days, and not to worry about me.

LIRA. We'll do everything.

JULIA. Audax, please, for your own sake—don't look any more.

*(Audax presses her hand and leaves)*

LIRA. God knows what the men are up to again.

JULIA. Murder, what else?

LIRA. But why? Because they couldn't agree? I don't understand.

JULIA. Who knows?

LIRA. Maybe we shouldn't stay.

JULIA. It hurts, but I want to see it.

*(Now they are swallowed up by the crowd of ragged citizens. A few soldiers are among them. Most of the people sit quietly on the ground. Some listless conversation. A late citizen asks whether this is the place where "he" will speak. Then the fourth citizen suddenly accosts the fifth)*

FOURTH. Why're you staring at me?

FIFTH. Staring at you?

FOURTH. Yeah. Staring at me.

FIFTH. I've been staring at you?

FOURTH. That's what I said. You've been staring at me.

FIFTH. So I've been staring at you. But not because you're a picture of Apollo.

FOURTH. What do you mean? Is there something funny about me?  
*(To the sixth citizen)* You too? Anything funny about me?

SIXTH. No. Nothing funny about you. I ain't laughing. Nothing except what everybody knows.

SEVENTH. All right. That's enough.

FOURTH. What everybody knows? What does everybody know, you bastard? I'll kill you.

SIXTH. You call me bastard?

FOURTH. That's what I call you. And anybody else that stares at me.

SEVENTH. Come on, that's enough.

FOURTH. Because there's nobody in this town got a human right to stare at me. That's right. I was a soldier in the service twelve years.

FIFTH. Sure. Raiding the stalls in the market.

FOURTH. You stinking bastard!

FIFTH. That's enough. *(They fight)* You ain't fit to be seen among decent people.

FOURTH. I'll show you who's fit.

*(Others try to interfere, but the fourth citizen has the upper hand)*

EIGHTH. For shame! Retogenes himself is coming to speak to us.

FIFTH. Let go! Let go!

FOURTH. Twelve years in the service while you was putting on weight and now you think you got the right to stare at me. Bastard, bastard, bastard!

SEVERAL. Let him go! You're choking him! God damn you! There's an assembly of the people here!

*(But the fifth citizen has finally disengaged himself. He strikes a violent blow. The fourth citizen falls backward)*

FIFTH. Cannibal!

*(Suddenly everybody falls silent. The fourth citizen slowly picks himself up. He is weeping. He drags himself away)*

FIFTH. He provoked me. Leave me alone.

EIGHTH. Forget it.

SEVENTH. Yes. Forget it.

SIXTH. He provoked you.

NINTH. Anyway, I think Retogenes is bringing good news.

TENTH. Me too.

ELEVENTH. I think we can manage another go at the wall. Masses of us. Torches. Ladders. And when that's done we'll talk peace.

TWELFTH. They'll have to carry you into battle on a stretcher.

ELEVENTH. Maybe you'd like to join the Peace Party. There's rope enough for everybody's neck.

TWELFTH. You don't scare me. I've got my thoughts.

EIGHTH. Don't start another quarrel, if you please.

*(Various remarks and grumbles. The group subsides. During this episode, Marcius has come in with a friend)*

MARCIUS. Is he here?

FRIEND. I'm looking. Yes, he is. Don't look now. But in a moment turn casually to the left and glance at the Tax Collector's house. The man standing up is Marandro.

MARCIUS. The one in black? With the finger in his ear?

FRIEND. That's the man.

MARCIUS. All right. Stay here. *(He walks casually)* Are you Marandro?

MARANDRO. Marandro, import and export; in the good days, alas.

MARCIUS. May I have a word with you—on the side?

MARANDRO. At your service. *(They walk aside)*

A WOMAN IN THE CROWD. Food! Give us food instead of fighting like dogs!

A MAN. Back to your kitchen.

MARCIUS. I'm told you've got food stored away.

MARANDRO *(frightened)*. Who t-t-told you this trash? Food? In Numantia?

MARCIUS. Calm down. We're safe in the crowd.

MARANDRO. Who are you?

MARCIUS. I'm somebody whose children are hungry. I'm nobody else. And I'll pay you whatever you want for whatever you've got. Caro told me about you.

MARANDRO. What did he tell you?

MARCIUS. That you sit like a dragon on a heap of victuals.

MARANDRO. It's not true. Like a what? Do I look like I have food? Why did c-c-Caro tell you this trash? You're from the p-p-p-police, that's clear enough.

MARCIUS. If I were from the police I'd be searching your cellar. Come on, Marandro, talk business or else the police *will* hear from me. *(Grim)* Besides, I'll kill a man for a piece of bread. What have you got and how much do you want?

MARANDRO. I haven't got anything. But I might get in t-t-touch with somebody. Maybe!

MARCIUS. What has your somebody got, and how much does your somebody want?

MARANDRO. A p-p-pound of flour for sixty silver denarii.

MARCIUS (*quietly*). Your somebody is lower than a dead stinking mongrel. What does he hope to do with silver? Bribe an eagle to fly him out of Numantia?

MARANDRO. That's his business. Good-bye.

MARCIUS. Wait. I'll pay. Sixty in silver. For two pounds of flour.

MARANDRO. A p-p-pound and a half.

MARCIUS. It's children, Marandro; not myself, children. What kind of animal are you?

MARANDRO. All right. Two pounds. Let it be.

MARCIUS. Where and when?

*(Marandro takes him aside. His answer is drowned in shouts from the crowd. A few distinct calls can be heard)*

VOICE. Here they are!

VOICE. Retogenes!

VOICE. Caravino!

VOICE. Audax!

VOICE. Speech! Hurrah! Hang Scipio!

VOICE. Where are the prisoners?

VOICE. Action!

VOICE. They'll sell us to Rome for a pound of meat!

*(Audax and escort enter)*

AUDAX. Peace! Silence! Order! No riots here!

VOICE. Bravo for the general!

AUDAX. The prisoners—(*uproar*)—silence! The prisoners are being taken to jail. No violence will be tolerated.

VOICE. Are you going to feed them in jail?

VOICE. Make them starve!

*(Shouts of approval)*

AUDAX. Peace everybody! Let them plead their case in court!

VOICE. The Romans don't let traitors plead. Why should we?

VOICE. Did they allow your son to plead?

*(Voices silence him)*

VOICE. Forget the prisoners! Give us bread!

*(Shouts of approval, "Food, food," etc.)*

AUDAX. Make way for the governor!

*(Enter Retogenes, Caravino, soldiers, escort. Retogenes leaps up some steps. Caravino is at his side)*

RETOGENES. Numantians! The Peace Party is under arrest at last!

VOICE. Good work!

VOICE. Is it because they made peace, or didn't make peace, or what?

VOICE. I'm for peace, and I don't care who hears it!

VOICE. Your knees wobbling?

VOICE. Coward!

VOICE. Shut your mouths, all of you, and let the leaders speak!

RETOGENES. Friends, friends, friends! Let me say my word for God's sake! The law is the law. We catch Avarus and his friends sending secret messages to the enemy and getting secret replies. The law strictly forbids unauthorized contacts with the enemy! In defiance, they negotiate behind our backs as if they had authority.

CARAVINO. And negotiate for special terms for themselves. We strongly suspect it. We have evidence. Once they're in jail, we'll pry loose the truth.

VOICE. Make them sweat!

CARAVINO. You are the people! Decide for us! What shall we do with a gang that bargains in secret with Scipio?

TWO OR THREE VOICES. Hang them!

CROWD. Hang them!

VOICE. Let's do it ourselves!

VOICE. These men should be heard by our judges.

VOICE. The people are the judges!

VOICE. Ropes! Ropes!

VOICE. Here they come!

*(Uproar. Refrain of "Hang them, hang them!")*

AUDAX *(To Retogenes and Caravino)*. There's going to be a massacre! Have the prisoners moved back and taken another way!

RETOGENES *(through the noise)*. Don't be a child, general.

AUDAX. I won't allow it! Call for calm!

AN OFFICER. Stand back everybody! Make room for the prisoners!

AUDAX *(to his men, drawing his sword)*. Make a circle around the prisoners! *(They hesitate)* A circle around them, do you hear? Keep the mob away! No violence! Hands off! Back! Back!

THE CROWD *(continuing)*. Hang them! Hang them!

VOICES. The prisoners!

*(Four gagged and bound prisoners are brought in. The mob surges against them, still shouting, but is tentatively held back by Audax's men)*

VOICES. Justice! Justice!

AUDAX *(waving his sword)*. Let no one dare!

VOICE. Show some pity, you beasts!

VOICE. Peace and food!

VOICES. Grab those bastards!

A MAN. Here's pity for you!

*(He hurls a stone. One of the prisoners stumbles to the ground. A woman screams and rushes to the fallen victim)*

WOMAN. Let me through! Let me through! They stoned my husband!

*(The crowd falls silent)*

AUDAX. Arrest that man! That one—there—grab him.



*(A soldier seizes the stone-thrower)*

THE STONE-THROWER. Somebody help me!

AUDAX. Get back, all of you! Away with him!

WOMAN. My husband is hurt!

VOICE. Leave her alone for God's sake!

VOICE. Hang her with the rest of them!

*(Audax helps the woman)*

AUDAX. The next man who throws a stone is dead!

VOICE. Don't be too rough on us, general! *(Laughter)*

RETOGENES *(to Caravino)*. Wait.

THE WOMAN *(shaking her fist)*. Rabble! Rabble! Retogenes, tell them! Tell them you and him are on Scipio's blacklist! *(Her husband tries to stop her)* You want the people to bleed with you! You're going to kill my husband—let me talk, let me talk!—you're going to kill my husband so—

CARAVINO. General! One of the prisoners is freeing his hands!

RETOGENES. Hold him!

AUDAX. Nothing's happening! Make room!

RETOGENES. All right! Let the prisoners march quietly.

WOMAN. Take me along.

RETOGENES. Yes, take her along, the witch, take her along. Open a way for them.

AUDAX. Make a circle. Keep out—you! Away! *(To an officer)* Your responsibility. On your life.

OFFICER. Make way. March. March.

*(The mob grumbles but allows the prisoners, the woman, and the escort to pass and leave)*

CARAVINO. People of Numantia, rest assured, the prisoners will be tried fairly, and they will not escape. Meantime, gird yourselves—the struggle continues. Our allies are arming. We are strong. The summer heat is sapping the Roman army. Shall we ever surrender? Shout it with me so the Romans out there can hear you: Never!

THE CROWD. Never!  
RETOGENES. Never!  
THE CROWD. Never!

*(The crowd slowly breaks up. A few people are left, among them Marandro, Julia, and Lira. Retogenes is gone, but Caravino lingers)*

CARAVINO *(privately to Audax)*. You were a trifle uncooperative—  
AUDAX. Don't make me raise my voice, Caravino. I saw your agents in the crowd. They've earned their pay. But murder is not *my* duty.  
CARAVINO. Murder? General, if I were you I'd think of murder elsewhere.

*(He gestures toward the ramparts)*

AUDAX. What I think of is my business.  
CARAVINO. Is it? We are all extremely interested in your thoughts.  
AUDAX. Here's one of them. Why was I kept in the dark about these so-called secret meetings and messages?  
CARAVINO. Not guilty! So were we in the Council.  
AUDAX. Kept in the dark? How did the meetings come to light?  
CARAVINO. They were revealed to us.  
AUDAX. By whom?  
CARAVINO. They were revealed.

*(Audax looks at him)*

AUDAX. By Avarus himself! That trusting simpleton! I should have guessed!  
CARAVINO. Let him prove it. And let him learn that *we* are the government, not he. Good day, general.

*(Caravino goes. Audax deep in thought, then notices the two women)*

AUDAX. Were you two watching this pathetic circus? You shouldn't have stayed. If you approved of it, you're fools; if you didn't, you're suspects.

JULIA. Audax—

AUDAX. Yes?

JULIA. Be careful ....

AUDAX. Ha! Just what Connoba said to me.

LIRA. We mean well, and we're concerned for you. I've known you all so long—

AUDAX. I am thankful, Lira, don't misunderstand.

JULIA. Audax, I don't know what right I have—I want to ask you a question—not an easy one—

AUDAX. Ask me anything my Cornelia might have wanted to know.

JULIA (*low*). Why haven't you resigned? I'm terribly afraid ...

AUDAX (*low*). Because the next day I'd be arrested, and the day after hanged; along with Avarus and the rest.

*(Julia looks into his face, and then lowers her head)*

JULIA. They do horrible things—but how can anyone keep decent and sane—with all this? And when all's said and done—

AUDAX. It's us. I understand.

JULIA. This is our home. I was married here. You too. You and Cornelia ...

LIRA. And how else can they act? You can't win a war with prayers. I'm sorry for these people. I don't think Retogenes is always right. But people who go in for secret meetings—

JULIA. We mustn't stay any longer.

AUDAX. Thank you, both of you.

LIRA. We'll look after everything.

*(As the two women move away, the death-bell is heard off-stage)*

JULIA. Come the other way ....

*(Julia and Lira leave. A tumbrel now rattles on stage. It is drawn by two men between the traces, and is loaded full of bodies. The gravedigger walks behind ringing the death-bell. At one of the windows a woman appears. She speaks in a forlorn blank voice)*

WOMAN. Here.

GRAVEDIGGER. Age and sex? *(No answer)* Age and sex, up there?

WOMAN. A little boy. Eleven years and two months old.

GRAVEDIGGER. Bring him down.

WOMAN. I can't.

GRAVEDIGGER. Why can't you?

WOMAN. I can't.

GRAVEDIGGER. All right. Keep him.

AUDAX. Wait. *(To the woman)* We'll fetch him down, and decently. Open the door for us. *(He sees Marandro)* You there, citizen. Come with me.

MARANDRO. Me, general?

AUDAX. Yes, you. What's your name?

MARANDRO. Marandro, sir.

AUDAX. Come along, Marandro. Don't dawdle.

*(Marandro reluctantly follows him into the house. A few moments later they reappear carrying the dead boy on a makeshift litter. Marandro is nauseated and tries to avert his face)*

AUDAX. Lift up. He'll fall. *(Impatiently)* Up!

*(He manages to place the boy carefully in the wagon)*

GRAVEDIGGER. There's usually something for us.

*(Marandro has stepped aside. Audax looks at the window, which is empty, then gives the gravedigger some money)*

GRAVEDIGGER. Thank you, general.

*(The cart moves off to the shaking of the bell)*

MARANDRO. Some p-p-people get used to it. I can't.

*(He and the one or two remaining citizens move off. The bell is heard to the end of the scene. Audax is alone. He remains in deep reflection,*

*looking again toward the plain below. Julia returns by herself)*

JULIA. I didn't want to leave you with her words, as though *I* meant them.

AUDAX. I know you better, Julia. Sister....

JULIA. Yes?

AUDAX. I was going to tell you tonight. I am leaving soon.

JULIA (*frightened*). What do you mean?

AUDAX. What *can* I mean? Leaving.

JULIA. Leaving for where? (*Whispering, as he gestures toward the plain*) Going to Scipio? You can't—your own child—you can't.

AUDAX. I'll be an example to Numantia.

JULIA (*incredulous*). Your own child.

AUDAX. I had chosen him—in my mind, you understand—I had chosen him to survive. Now the last one is myself.

JULIA. Scipio murdered him!

AUDAX. Scipio? He had no reason to, and was even honest enough to return our bribe after that miserable brawl. No. The war murdered my son.

JULIA. And suppose we win the war?

AUDAX. I've lost my taste for victory. The old soldier has had enough.

JULIA. Audax, let me sit down. I'm trembling. Are you in serious danger?

AUDAX. Yes, but that doesn't count.

JULIA. You're not going to lead the Romans against us?

AUDAX. No, Julia. Never.

JULIA. Is there something I don't know? Has it all been wrong?

AUDAX. Nothing you don't know. And as for what's right and what's wrong, I'm done with that. Were we right to oppose the Romans? Yes we were. We were right, they were wrong. Rapacity sent them into Spain. They want slaves, gold, soldiers, markets. We were right, they were wrong. We have been right for two generations, they have been wrong for two generations. The young men died for the right, then the old people began to die for the right, then the women, then the children; and the houses fell down for the right, always for the right, mind you. I don't deny it. But now I'm sick of being right, I want this

people of mine to give in to the wrong and live. The wrong isn't all that wrong, and the right isn't all that right.

JULIA. You destroyed Aemilius and Brutus in the field before Scipio became consul. You could destroy Scipio himself.

AUDAX. In three years? five years? ten years?

JULIA. I don't know.

AUDAX. In three years of fighting and siege, might a child die? Yes, a child might die. It isn't worth it.

JULIA. Your city.

AUDAX. I would like it to remain standing. But Julia....

JULIA. Yes?

AUDAX. You'll be left alone soon. Marcellus is dying.

JULIA. Yes.

AUDAX. You have no children.

JULIA. I have no children.

AUDAX. Fortunate woman. The unborn don't die. If the worst should happen—

JULIA. What then?

AUDAX. There will be a great self-destruction here.

JULIA. I know.

AUDAX. Julia, listen to me. I beg you. If the day comes—if it comes, maybe it won't—play dead in your cellar, take whatever food you can find, don't stir, lock the door, answer to no one, and wait until the Romans are in possession. If they let me live I will find you again; if not—*(Julia is crying)* Julia....

JULIA. Is that your advice to me? Welcome to the first soldier that knocks down the door? Allow them to sell me? Become a charwoman in a Roman kitchen? Or worse? I'd rather die, it's ten times easier, I'll go with Marcellus, I'll kill myself when he is dead....

AUDAX. Julia—

JULIA. And you're running away, oh my God, my God....

AUDAX. Julia—how can I say it?—there's always time to make an end of it, don't you see? If you can bear it no longer—God knows it's easy, nothing else in this dirty world is easier. Don't die as a precaution, Julia, it's too absurd—promise—swear—raise your hand to me and swear!

JULIA. I can't. I'll be alone now. I can't bear it. My God, where are you, where are you, God, and why do we suffer so much? (*She is sobbing*)

## SCENE SIX: AMONG THE DEAD

*(The ruins of Numantia. Three elderly citizens—two men and a woman—kneeling in the rubble, tied up and guarded by a Roman soldier. Enter Polybius. He walks slowly, as though looking for something. He stares at the prisoners awhile. In the distance, the shouting of a crowd. Enter Buteo.)*

BUTEO. Polybius. I'm glad to see a friend.

POLYBIUS. Anything? Anyone?

BUTEO. Plenty of broken shoulders, scratched faces and bleeding hands.

POLYBIUS. What do you mean?

BUTEO. I mean our men digging into the rubble. We're taking losses without meeting an enemy.

POLYBIUS. Other than that?

BUTEO. Children. They seem to have spared the children here and there.

POLYBIUS. No one else?

BUTEO *(pointing to the prisoners)*. More of those. More raggle-taggle odds and ends that were spared or couldn't afford the knife to stick into their gut; and more children, starved and too astonished to be scared.

POLYBIUS. Will I ever forget that first child? You and your legionaries at one end of the street, swords, spears, helmets, breastplates, and that child at the other end, wondering whether all this was for her.

BUTEO. I'm grateful for one thing.

POLYBIUS. What's that?

BUTEO. The men aren't hungry for females. Otherwise, pah! Scipio was right, as usual. Our whores were bugled out the front door with great ceremony, and whistled back through the cellar with greater discretion. I know why you're smiling.

POLYBIUS. How your military purity was offended when you first met our harlots! And how your manly integrity was affronted when you saw Scipio winking! We couldn't calm you down!



BUTEO. Have you seen my uncle?

POLYBIUS. Oh yes.

BUTEO. How is he?

POLYBIUS. Wild. Keep searching, Buteo. He *demands* prisoners.

BUTEO. Well, mine's only one sector. Maybe the others will dig up some flesh for him. Has anyone found Retogenes yet? There's my great hope.

POLYBIUS. Killed in state and lying in the middle of the Council Chamber all by himself. He fooled us. Not like Hannibal, who went down with his ship, and came up again into ours.

BUTEO. And the others?

POLYBIUS. The others too. When Scipio saw them—

*(Another shout in the distance)*

BUTEO. What's that? What are they shouting about? Good news maybe.

*(Another shout)*

POLYBIUS. Can't you make it out?

BUTEO. No!

POLYBIUS. They're crowning Scipio and giving him a new name.

BUTEO. What name?

POLYBIUS. He is now Scipio Numantinus, in honor of this victory.

BUTEO. Not bad. Whose idea was it?

POLYBIUS. Mine.

BUTEO. I shouldn't have asked!

POLYBIUS. I thought it might distract your uncle. Perhaps give him something to tell the Senate. I whispered the hint to Maximus, who passed it on to the tribunes and down the ladder. All quite spontaneous.

BUTEO. Never mind. He deserves it. I tell you he does.

POLYBIUS. I don't deny it.

*(Enter a soldier)*

SOLDIER. Beg your pardon, sir.

BUTEO. Yes?

SOLDIER. Audax is requesting permission to look for some of his people in the city.

BUTEO. Why not? Keep two men with him.

SOLDIER. Right, sir. *(He leaves)*

POLYBIUS. I hope he finds somebody.

BUTEO. Isn't his wife dead?

POLYBIUS. Yes. She died in one of the epidemics. Look!

*(Enter Scipio hurriedly, followed by Maximus and several officers. He wears a crown of laurel which he angrily throws aside)*

SCIPIO. Prisoners! Give me prisoners, not crowns! Look at this! this! this! Shambles! Think of the promises I made to my men! *(Looks at his officers)* And you! What are you staring at? Don't follow Numantinus about! Go to Fulvius Flaccus! Or get me some prisoners! Scatter and find me some prisoners! Scratch the rubble!

BUTEO. Uncle—

SCIPIO. And keep the children away from me! *(To the soldier who is standing guard over the old prisoners)* You—what are you doing with these people?

SOLDIER. This is a temporary receiving point, sir. I'm supposed to collect a dozen prisoners before I carry them away.

SCIPIO. Cut their ropes.

SOLDIER. Yes, sir.

SCIPIO. Tying up old people! Have I come to this? Shame.... There, let me do it myself. Old fellow, don't be scared. What's your name?

OLD WOMAN. He's hard of hearing, my lord.

SCIPIO. Why are they kneeling here? Give them something to eat, for pity's sake, and let them sit or stand.

OLD MAN. Thank you, your excellence.

SCIPIO. He thanks me. And the city is broken, the temples down, the citadel burned, the people dead. Worse than Carthage. Why did they kill themselves? Am I an ogre? Is this courage? Wasn't there a man among them man enough to throw the sword away? Insanity! Name it in your chronicle, Polybius; insanity! And write this: Scipio entered

Numantia victorious again, and wept.

MAXIMUS (*aside to Scipio*). Brother, control yourself. You're making things worse for us. Proclaim it all went according to plan.

SCIPIO. Run away from me, Maximus. I'm done for. Give Fulvius a box of sweets.

MAXIMUS. What do you take me for?

SCIPIO. Where's Audax?

BUTEO. I allowed him to do a bit of searching on his own.

MAXIMUS. Under guard?

BUTEO. Sure.

MAXIMUS. Don't forget you've got Audax, brother. An authentic prize. The only survivor! It'll look dramatic in Rome.

SCIPIO. Dramatic! And I'll be the buffoon in the drama. (*Angry*) I had Rome knee deep in prisoners! Polybius!

POLYBIUS. Yes, sir.

SCIPIO (*taking him to one side*). I want you to keep looking for the gold, do you hear? I'll give you five hundred men to dig up foundations, debris, empty lots, anything. And we'll question every prisoner we get, babies, lunatics, cripples.

POLYBIUS. I'll keep at it, Scipio, but—

SCIPIO (*cold fury*). No buts. Find the gold.

POLYBIUS. I'll do all I can.

(*Enter a soldier*)

SOLDIER. Beg to report, sir.

SCIPIO. All right. What is it?

SOLDIER. Five more survivors in the south sector.

SCIPIO. What kind?

SOLDIER. A couple of them are old, but the others seem to be in pretty fair condition, sir.

SCIPIO. Bring them to me. I'll question them myself. (*The soldier leaves. To Polybius again, pointing to the prisoners*) What information did you get out of these?

POLYBIUS. I haven't—

SCIPIO. Why not? Why not? (*He grabs the old man*) You! Try to remember—did you hear any rumors about the gold in the temple or

treasury?

OLD MAN (*frightened*). They burned the furniture.

SCIPIO. The gold!

OLD WOMAN. We don't know, my lord. He's a little deaf, and we made sandals, out by the gardens....

BUTEO. Uncle—

SCIPIO. Pah! (*He lets the old man go*) Where's Audax? Oh yes. Leave me alone! Stare at each other. (*He pokes in the debris*) Watch me returning to Rome now. Ahh.

MAXIMUS. What's the matter?

SCIPIO. Nothing. A splinter. It's a foretaste, an omen. (*He sits down heavily and loses himself*)

BUTEO (*to Polybius*). What does he want you to do?

POLYBIUS. He wants me to find the gold.

MAXIMUS. The gold's melted down, gone, he knows it, damnation!

POLYBIUS. I know. But we'll keep digging.

SCIPIO (*looking at them suddenly*). Died for what? For the glory. But what's the use of glory you can't glory in? Idiots.

MAXIMUS (*to Polybius*). Go to him. All this talk about dying. It gives the wrong people ideas.

BUTEO. He owes it to the army to look cheerful.

*(A soldier has entered. He talks to Maximus)*

SOLDIER. A report from the western sector, general. May I hand it to Publius Cornelius Scipio?

MAXIMUS. Let me see it first. (*He reads it quickly. Polybius and Buteo look at him. He shakes his head*) Better not just now. I'll keep it. Go on back. (*Exit soldier*)

SCIPIO (*his back turned to them*). Yes, better keep it from Scipio. (*He rejoins the group*) All right, let's move along. I want to see every corner of the city. Buteo: the officers are to maintain absolute order, no grumbling, no petitions, no meetings. Let the prisoners be fed so they can be sold. Hands off the women and all officers to report under the citadel's ruins at sunset.

BUTEO. I'll see to everything.

SCIPIO. Where's Fulvius Flaccus?

BUTEO. Writing a dispatch.

MAXIMUS. Naturally.

SCIPIO. All right. You can go.

BUTEO (*to a couple of officers*). Follow me, please.

*(They leave)*

SCIPIO (*to Maximus*). What was that report?

MAXIMUS. From the western sector.

SCIPIO. Well?

MAXIMUS. Nothing.

POLYBIUS. Here's Audax...

*(Enter Audax, carrying Julia's body. Two soldiers are with him. He places the body gently on the ground)*

OLD WOMAN (*whispers to the old man*). Look! Look! It's Audax!

POLYBIUS. I'm sorry.

AUDAX. I washed her face at the fountain. So be it. I'm too dazed to think about it.

SCIPIO. Who is this?

AUDAX. My wife's sister.

SCIPIO. Let her be buried, and enough.

AUDAX (*to Polybius; he is kneeling by the body*). Have you found anyone?

POLYBIUS. Here and there....

AUDAX. Marquinius, the high priest?

POLYBIUS. Dead.

AUDAX. Retogenes, Caravino? (*Polybius shakes his head*) Dead? Caravino dead? By his own hand?

POLYBIUS (*his hand on Audax's shoulder*). Let's cover her. (*He removes his own cloak*)

AUDAX (*grasping Julia's face*). My dear, my dear....

POLYBIUS. Let me.... (*He covers the body*)

*(Audax rises, and notices the prisoners)*

AUDAX. A few remain, thank God. My people.

*(As he moves closer to the prisoners, the second old man suddenly stands up)*

SECOND OLD MAN. Turncoat! Renegade!

OLD WOMAN *(terrified)*. Hush, for pity's sake!

MAXIMUS. What's that?

SECOND OLD MAN. Renegade! I spit in your face! Your woman had more guts than you, you slimy coward!

FIRST OLD MAN. I didn't say anything!

SCIPIO. Take them away.

SOLDIER. All right, you. Get moving.

SECOND OLD MAN. Let the world know it! He knifed us in the back! He'll do the same for you, Romans! Renegade! May you rot like a leper!

OLD WOMAN. Hush up—oh God—

FIRST OLD MAN. I didn't say anything!

SOLDIER. Go on, damn you, shove off, on your feet, all of you!

SECOND OLD MAN. You're a mongrel without race—

POLYBIUS. Away!

SOLDIER. Move!

SECOND OLD MAN. I don't care. Renegade!

*(The prisoners are gone)*

SCIPIO. God love the common people. Well, general, you couldn't save Numantia for me, though you tried.

AUDAX *(low)*. Give me a dagger, Scipio.

SCIPIO. I need you in Rome. Afterward. . .

AUDAX *(frantic)*. Kill me! *(The guards hold him)*

SCIPIO. Guards, take General Audax back to the camp. Keep him safe and comfortable.

GUARD. Come along, general.

AUDAX *(struggling)*. I have a right to my sword!

GUARD. That's enough.

AUDAX. Give me a sword! Hands off! Respect! (*Sobbing, as the guards lead him away*) Kill the scoundrel! Kill me! (*He is gone*)

SCIPIO. Once a victor in the field, then a trophy behind my chariot in Rome, finally a slave. So the wheel turns, Polybius. Note it in your chronicle.

MAXIMUS. What next, brother?

SCIPIO. Next? To my own hole, as the wheel keeps turning. Come here, Polybius. If I don't keep you busy you'll be running to Audax to hold his hand. Gold, Polybius, I need gold for the Senate, fasten your mind on *that*.

MAXIMUS. What about the troops?

SCIPIO (*wearily*). The troops. Make more promises. Organize thanksgiving services to the gods.

MAXIMUS. Why not athletic games, too? But try to look satisfied, Publius, that's what matters the most. Come on, give us a hearty word.

SCIPIO (*picking up the laurel crown he had thrown away*). There's my crown, brother. Keep it for your grandchildren.

*(They move on)*

## SCENE SEVEN: THE SLAVE

*(The setting of Scene One again)*

AUDAX. My life nauseated me. I thought the ghost of my son would rise—with such hatred in its face.... And still, after all these years.... Not so my wife. Her look is gentle...I think.

MARANDRO. Ghosts are good c-c-company, old soldier.

AUDAX. Old soldier. Strange to meet somebody who remembers. My life went into another language, and now I'm hearing the old tongue again.... When I remind the young rascals hereabout who I was, "Run for your lives," they cry, "the old man's off on his Spanish horse again!" All in fun, maybe, but Tuccia gives them a scolding anyway.

MARANDRO. Tuccia? Oh yes, T-t-tuccia. I thought—

AUDAX. She's no queen or princess, but I've learned not to be fastidious. So has she! Look at me! She's as cozy as an old pillow, a good cook besides, and the children, well, they're not mine, but—I'm what they have, and that's a good feeling. I recite Homer to them:

And if some god torments me  
Far out on the wine-dark sea,  
I shall endure it.

MARANDRO. If the townspeople could have guessed you'd be here with your T-t-tuccia, and reciting Homer to the children in your lap, they'd have howled twice as much as they did.

AUDAX. I wanted to give an example. I wanted life, life for my people.

MARANDRO. That's a good one! There was a wild p-p-p-panic, I tell you, when they missed you.

AUDAX *(flaring up)*. It didn't keep you from struggling another six weeks and then killing and dying like drunkards. I watched it. I was in Scipio's camp, don't forget, I sent messages, talked to envoys, pleaded, but to no avail. Retogenes won. "Death before slavery!" And on the last day—



MARANDRO. Don't t-t-talk about it.

AUDAX. I entered Numantia with Scipio. Like a madman. Bellowing for life, looking for—looking for those I knew. Even Scipio broke down and wept.

MARANDRO. Well, Scipio is dead, you're telling stories—

AUDAX. Spain is a Roman province—

MARANDRO. And the farmer went back to his plough.

AUDAX. If he survived.

MARANDRO. Thank God, a few of us did. You know, to c-c-c-carry on the name of Numantia.

AUDAX. Don't talk rot, Marandro. Oh! I beg your pardon, sir. *(He rises)*

MARANDRO. Never mind. Sit down, sit down.

AUDAX. I forgot....

MARANDRO. That's all right.... How things do turn around, though....

AUDAX. You don't know the tenth part of it, Marandro. I saw Scipio lying in a bloody heap in Rome. And was I glad? Not even. A slave doesn't care. I've learned to dig in the fields and I've built bridges for armies and I've carried stones for monuments to governors and heroes, usually dead ones, and I've been struck in the mouth and I've bowed to idiots and I've had three ribs smashed and I've been sold and sold again and now I'm a broken old man.

MARANDRO. With Tuccia in a cabin.

AUDAX. Yes. To be sure. And now and then a good year or two. Which reminds me; I ought to get going and attend to my duties. *(He doesn't move. Long silence)* Once I had a master eighty-seven years old. I don't remember where. I think in Smyrna. I fed him, dressed him, combed his three hairs, wiped the drool off his lips, sat him on his chamber pot, and scratched his back. That was the only pleasure left to him—so I scratched. But those were the good days. Look—*(he shows Marandro his ankle)* wait—here too. *(He shows his neck)* See the dent? Go on, touch it!

MARANDRO. I don't have to. I see it.

AUDAX. The ankle is from working in a chain gang in the fields. And in silence, or else, *clak!* Chained up at night, too. But the neck wasn't so pleasant. That was in Brundisium, in a bakery. They put a wooden

saucer round your neck—I suppose you've never seen one?

MARANDRO. No—I—

AUDAX. They clap it around your windpipe—about this wide around so you can just see over the edge to work the dough, but you can't lift any of it to your mouth.

MARANDRO. Why remember those awful times? A quiet night like this.

AUDAX. You're right, you're right. The advantage of being rich and free is that you can order any stories you like. You live. Look at you! I just survive.

MARANDRO. Fiddlesticks! There's nobody keeps *my* nest warm. And how about right here? It doesn't look like a t-t-terrible bad life.

AUDAX. I suppose not.

MARANDRO. If I come back, I'll let you stay home nights.

AUDAX. That will be a good thing too, though to tell you the truth—

MARANDRO. What?

AUDAX. One Spaniard to another?

MARANDRO. Of course.

AUDAX. I don't really stay up all night. About midnight something comes over me and I creep back under the covers with Tuccia.

MARANDRO (*laughing*). Old horse-thief!

AUDAX (*laughing too*). No harm done, you know. And if a tramp makes off with a few chickens now and then, why the chickens are as happy with him as with the master. But it doesn't happen much. Mummius is in the house. Mummius is the lad with the serious face who takes care of you here.

MARANDRO. Yes, I know.

AUDAX. We're friends. He sleeps light, and he tells me to go home and warm my feet.

MARANDRO. So there it is.

AUDAX. So there it is. Oh well, I'd better be going. The horses don't sleep easy until I've gone by the stable.

MARANDRO. Yes, time for bed. (*They rise*) Good night, old soldier. It was a good t-t-t-talk. With luck, we'll meet again.

AUDAX. I'll be a faithful servant to you, sir.

MARANDRO. I'm sure of it. (*He presses some coins on Audax*) Here....

AUDAX. Oh no, sir, I won't—

MARANDRO. For the children. Not a word. I'm off.

AUDAX. For the children. Thank you.

MARANDRO. Not a word.

AUDAX. Thank you.

*(Marandro is gone. Only his voice is heard)*

MARANDRO. Oh, Audax.

AUDAX. Sir?

MARANDRO. There's some fruit on the table. T-t-take everything home.

AUDAX. I will, sir. *(Alone, he looks at the coins)* Shoes this winter, little devils! *(He takes one coin away and hides it)* You never know. *(He draws near the table)* Three peaches! Should I? *(He drops two peaches into a scrip and contemplates the third)* Beautiful.... I'll take a mouthful, and Tuccia will eat the rest. It isn't every day. *(He bites into the peach)* It rivers into my mouth, it licks me. Hmm. Too luscious for a soldier. *(The peach goes into the bag. He picks up his lantern, kneels at the fountain, wipes his mouth and drinks. He plays with the water)* Smile for me, affectionate water.... The moon winks in it.... Rivulet down the mountain. Juice of a peach. Sap in a tree. Moistness on a stone. Rain, rain and rain. The sea, and Venus rising from it. And the living body! Tears and blood, urine and milk, male seed and woman's secreted answer. A drooling baby.... *(He chuckles)*

*(Mummius appears at an upper window)*

MUMMIUS. What now, general, talking to yourself?

AUDAX. I—I was making up a story for the children. But I'm on my way, trust me, friend.

MUMMIUS. I do. All the same, don't forget to lock the greenhouse.

AUDAX. I'll lock the greenhouse.

MUMMIUS. And make sure the lamp by the master's door—

AUDAX. Has enough oil for the night. I'll see to it.

MUMMIUS. He doesn't like the dark.

AUDAX. I know. Neither do I.

*The Fall of Numantia*

MUMMIUS. Nor I. Good night, old friend.

AUDAX. Good night, Mummius.

*(Mummius vanishes. Audax picks up the lantern, looks at it, and starts to go. Darkness all around)*

AUDAX. Shine, little light, shine while you can....

*(He disappears)*

**THE END**

# Prince Poupon Needs a Wife

## Foreword

Lovers of French classic comedies will recognize that *Prince Poupon Needs a Wife* is unequivocally a reconception of *La Double inconstance* (1722), one of Marivaux's brilliant early plays. I translated *La Double inconstance* faithfully and literally many years ago for inclusion in my *Seven Comedies* by Marivaux, the first collection of Marivaux's comedies ever published in the English language. A number of passages from this translation are embedded in my reconception. Indeed, more of Marivaux shows up in my play than what there is of Calderón in *Sigismund, Prince of Poland*, or of Cervantes in *The Fall of Numantia*. Nevertheless, even though it owes its birth, its basic intrigue, some of its words, and all of its spirit to another man's genius, *Prince Poupon* does qualify as a new play.

The spirit I am speaking of has been taking so many lumps in our age—in France as badly as in England and America (and, I suppose, everywhere else)—that I am moved to plead with directors not to tamper with the lightness and with the reticences of *Prince Poupon*. For instance, where I have Lisa squeeze Robin's leg muscles ("Hercules!") and Robin tells her to stop, don't overdo it, don't be obvious, don't overreach, let the hint suffice. And this goes for the sexy finale between Lisa and Trivet. Dare throughout to be in good taste, if I may use this venerable expression; and don't psychologize, don't "deepen," don't smear things with gloom. The audience will be surprisingly grateful. Dare to be delicate and merry; the comedy's intelligence, which is not insubstantial, will survive.

One expects a bevy of servants to come, go, announce and escort, and fetch and carry in any self-respecting princely palace. I have suppressed them in the interest of thrift, but directors are to consider themselves free to call as many of them in as they please.

## Characters

Prince Poupon XVII, *ruler of Pouponaco.*

Sylvia, *a village girl.*

Robin, *a village lad.*

Flaminia, *daughter of a deceased courtier.*

Lisa, *her younger sister.*

Trivet, *a trusted servant in the prince's service.*

*The action takes place throughout in an elegantly decorated chamber in the prince's palace. A large grim painting of Poupon the First hangs on the wall.*

## ACT ONE

*(Enter Sylvia and Trivet)*

TRIVET. Won't you listen to me, Madame Sylvia?

SYLVIA. Don't bother me.

TRIVET. But shouldn't a person be reasonable?

SYLVIA. No, a person shouldn't.

TRIVET. And yet—

SYLVIA. And yet I don't want to be reasonable. You can repeat “and yet” fifty times if you wish. I'll still refuse to be reasonable. So what will you do about it?

TRIVET. You ate such a light supper last night, dear Sylvia, you'll become ill unless you take breakfast this morning.

SYLVIA. I despise health and I'm glad to be sick; so there. Don't trouble yourself, send everything back, because I'll have neither breakfast, nor lunch, nor dinner today; nor tomorrow either. You took me away from Robin, and now all I care to do is to be furious and to hate you one and all until I've seen him again. Those are my resolutions, and if you want to drive me insane, keep telling me to be reasonable and you'll soon have done it.

TRIVET. God help me, I don't intend to try; I can see you'll keep your word. And yet if I dared—

SYLVIA (*angrier*). Another “and yet”!

TRIVET. Oh, I beg your pardon, this one was a slip, but it's the last one; I stand corrected. Only I should like you to consider...

SYLVIA. I thought you stood corrected! I don't want your considerations!

TRIVET (*continuing*)...that the man who wants to marry you is your prince.

SYLVIA. I can't keep him from falling in love with me; he's not the first! But am I compelled to love him in return? No, I am not; and why not? Because love can't be compelled. What could be simpler? And I—I will marry for love.



TRIVET. Love love love love! If our revered Prince Poupon the Seventeenth has chosen you among his humble subjects, he has done so, believe me, for the highest reasons of state, and not for puppy love.

SYLVIA. In that case who told him to choose me of all girls? Did he ask my opinion? Let him take his highest reasons of state to another victim. Instead, he has a gang of masked men carry me off from the village, and never asks how I feel about it.

TRIVET. Confess that they carried you off with every mark of courtesy, set you down gently on cushions in a luxurious coach, and landed you in one of Prince Poupon's grandest suites. Treated you, in short, like his future wife and Princess of Pouponaco.

SYLVIA. I want to be Robin's wife, not Princess of Pouponaco. Do you force people to take presents in spite of themselves?

TRIVET. But do consider, future Princess, how he has treated you in the two days you've been here. Aren't you waited on as though you were already his consort? Look at the tokens of respect offered to you, the number of women in your retinue, the entertainments you've enjoyed at his command. What is this Robin—a farmhand, God help him!—next to a Prince who showers you with delicate attentions—a young, handsome Prince who will not even appear before you—who shyly hides from you—until you are willing to meet him? For heaven's sake, open your eyes to your good fortune!

SYLVIA. Tell me—you, and all the women who are giving me advice—are you being paid to irritate me with your babble?

TRIVET. I do what I can; that's the sum of my wisdom.

SYLVIA. Your wisdom has accomplished precious little.

TRIVET. But will you at least tell me where I am wrong?

SYLVIA. Yes, I'll tell you, yes. Why have your people set four or five geese to spy on me day and night under pretence of serving me? My love is taken away from me, I'm given these women to replace him, and now I'm expected to be happy! And what's all this music to me, all these singers and these dancers? Robin used to sing better than any of them, and as for dancing, let me tell you I'd rather dance myself than watch others doing it. A simple girl happy in her village is better off than a princess weeping in a palace. Is the prince running after me? That's not my fault. I didn't look for him, and he needn't have looked for me. Is he young and attractive? So much the better for him;

I'm glad. Let him keep himself for his equals, and let him leave me my poor Robin, who is no more the fancy gentleman than I am the fancy lady; who is no richer, no vainer, and no better lodged than I am; who loves me without frills, whom I love the same way, and for whom I'll die of grief if I don't see him again. Poor boy! What have they done to him? What has become of him? Wherever he is he's wallowing in tears, I know it, because he's so kind, so good! Maybe he's being mistreated by those same masked villains.... Oh, I'm beside myself! Look here, Mr. Trivet, do you really want to please me? Take yourself away, I can't bear the sight of you. Leave me alone with my grief.

TRIVET. This is blunt and clear. But set your mind at rest—

SYLVIA. Go away!

TRIVET. I repeat, set your mind at rest. You want to see Robin, and Robin will stand before you before the day is over.

SYLVIA. I'm going to see my own Robin?

TRIVET. And talk to your own Robin, too.

SYLVIA. I don't know whether I ought to believe you. I'll go wait for him in my rooms. But if this is a trick, I'll claw my way out of here no matter what dungeon you lock me in.

*(She leaves. From the other side, the prince and Flaminia have entered and watched her go out)*

PRINCE *(to Trivet)*. Well? Is there any hope? What does she say?

TRIVET. Nothing worth repeating, my lord. She adores Robin, she can't wait to see him again, she doesn't want to set eyes on you, and she prefers bread and milk in her village to becoming Princess of Pouponaco. Frankly, if I may express an underling's opinion, I would suggest putting her back where we found her.

FLAMINIA. I've suggested the same thing already. What, my lord, what happened to the inclination you used to show to my sister Lisa? Poor Lisa! Weeping in secret. Forsaken by a fickle prince....

PRINCE. Flaminia dear, I swear to make it up to her, and to you as well. But you know what Dr. Vascularius has said—Dr. Vascularius, my infallible court astrologer and physician. The Poupon line is growing feebler every generation. *(He points at the painting)* My ancestors were warriors with thick moustaches and grim helmets who

hacked away at their enemies on the battlefield, whereas I, seventeenth of the line, play croquet on the lawn and when fatigued, which is much of the time, the viola in my apartments. The Poupous need new blood, and that new blood must come from the People—says Dr. Vascularius, and I believe him. You and Lisa, my dear, are the daughters of a nobleman, God forgive him even though he gambled his and your fortunes away in my casinos. And I absolutely must mate with the earth and beget a row of stalwarts worthy of Poupon the First. Besides, I'm falling in love with my Sylvia.

FLAMINIA. You're an incurable dreamer, my lord.

PRINCE. Remember how I met her. Looking for mushrooms in my usual incognito as Baron Belair, I met Sylvia and asked her for a cup of milk out of the pail she was carrying. She made the dearest curtsy as she offered it, almost stumbling in the grass. And after that I went mushrooming every day—if it wasn't raining—and drank her milk, her eyes, her healthy buxom figure, and the hope of our race.

FLAMINIA. After that, what can one say?

TRIVET. One can say that there's something uncanny about that girl. It isn't natural for a woman to reject wealth and power. This creature belongs to a species unknown to us. There's a warning here; we're dealing with a prodigy. Send her back to her pots and pans and hang Dr. Vascularius.

PRINCE. Don't be macabre, Trivet.

FLAMINIA. Since you insist, my lord—

PRINCE. Irrevocably.

FLAMINIA. We'll have to march firmly forward. The love that holds Sylvia and Robin together must be destroyed.

TRIVET. Impossible. I told you this girl is unnatural.

FLAMINIA (*laughing*). Don't listen to his unnatural, my lord; Trivet has been reading fairy tales. I promise to prove to you that Sylvia is as natural as the rest of us women; and that's all I need to bring her down to where we women live. But when shall we see Robin?

TRIVET. Very soon.

PRINCE. I'm afraid we're taking a great risk, Flaminia. Robin saw me several times as Baron Belair together with Sylvia. Besides, if she sees him, she will fall into his arms more passionately than ever.

TRIVET. True; yet if she doesn't see him, she'll go mad; she promised it herself.

FLAMINIA. Trust me, my lord, we need Robin.

PRINCE. Very well, keep him here as long as you can. Tell him I'll lavish gold and titles on him if he'll kindly marry somebody else.

TRIVET. And if he refuses, we'll hang him instead of Dr. Vascularius.

PRINCE. That is what my ancestors would have done but I am too soft and kind to do; another proof that I must reinvigorate my line. Let me hear from both of you that I can count on you to second my efforts.

FLAMINIA. I swear to help you with all my might.

TRIVET. And so do I.

FLAMINIA. Even though my sister and I will be the losers.

PRINCE. On no account. Let me succeed, stand by me, and I shall restore your fortunes as if your dear father—

ALL THREE. May he rest in peace—

PRINCE. Had never touched a card or seen a roulette table. You too, Trivet, if you are loyal, you'll not call me a niggard.

TRIVET. I am yours body and soul, my lord.

PRINCE. Fortunately, I am not bereft of ideas. Indeed, my mind has been furiously at work and I have hatched an idea worthy of Poupon the Eighth, he who introduced backgammon to Pouponaco. My idea is this: Flaminia, we must send your sister Lisa into the fray.

FLAMINIA. Explain, my lord.

PRINCE. Robin must marry her.

FLAMINIA (*appalled*). Sir!

TRIVET. Oh harsh declivity!

PRINCE. Not so. Lisa will not marry simple Robin, but Count Robinet; she will forget me in a flurry of receptions, balls, horse-races and nights at the opera; and we shall be rid of Sylvia's lover without bloodshed. What do you think of this Machiavellian scheme?

FLAMINIA. Allow me to doubt—

PRINCE. Lisa is beautiful, voluptuous, a coquette, ambitious.

FLAMINIA. My sweet sister!

PRINCE. And I can rely on her to turn the farmboy's head.

TRIVET. That farmboy is raving for love of Sylvia.

PRINCE. Pish! No more objections! Your prince is speaking. Take care that you implement my decision.

TRIVET and FLAMINIA. We will, my lord.

PRINCE. And don't exhaust me with more objections, do you hear?

*(Exit the prince)*

FLAMINIA. Our master has spoken, and we had better obey. Call my sister, Trivet.

TRIVET. No need, here she comes. I'll go meet Robin while you prepare her for her amorous conquest. *(He leaves)*

*(Enter Lisa)*

LISA. What are my orders, Flaminia? I met Poupon in the corridor. He averted his eyes but sent me to you for I don't know what instructions.

FLAMINIA. You are aware that our beloved ruler has put it into his brain to marry—

LISA. A goose from the village pond. It's the only topic from one end of the palace to the other. I'm being divorced before I'm married. What's going to become of us, sister?

FLAMINIA. Don't worry. We'll rise out of the rubble by another way. Your instructions are to turn Robin's head, marry him as Count Robinet, and enable the three of us to live happily ever after.

LISA. Well, why not. I've caught a glimpse of our potato digger, and he is as fit a biped as the others I've known. But do you think a helpless maiden like me can turn his head? Inspect me a little.

FLAMINIA. Hm. You're in excellent shape.

LISA *(laughing)*. I know I am.

FLAMINIA. And you see to it that everybody's aware of it.

LISA. Thank you.

FLAMINIA. A little more mascara here; and here.

LISA. Done.

FLAMINIA. Let me see you walk. Powerful! But the voice must contribute its share. Say something.

LISA. Count Robinet, why are you persecuting me?

FLAMINIA. That should melt him. At least I hope it will. Use all your arts, by which I mean, be yourself; now vivacious and giddy,

now nonchalant, now tender, now mincing; your eyes naughty, aiming to kill; your gait seductive and dissipated; your talk spiced with quips and nonsense. But don't overdo it. Our inexperienced rustic might not approve; your charms might be too strong for his taste. Imagine a man who has never drunk anything but clear fresh water; pour the champagne, but pour it carefully.

LISA. Somehow, the way you describe my charms, they don't sound as lovely as you say they are.

FLAMINIA. I was analyzing them; that's why they sound absurd. But with men you're safe.

LISA. One more item. What about my scruples? If I don't truly fall in love with our hero, I'll feel dishonest. Don't forget I'm a respectable girl.

FLAMINIA. You're a *ruined* respectable girl.

LISA. That does make a difference, doesn't it. I'll keep reminding my conscience. And to make a start, I'll go dream in my boudoir of receptions, balls, horse-races and nights at the opera until the moment you tell me to open fire.

FLAMINIA. Here comes Robin; but it's too soon to start. Come, let's go the other way.

*(Exeunt Flaminia and Lisa. Enter Trivet and Robin)*

TRIVET. Well, Master Robin, how do you like it here? Isn't it a handsome house?

ROBIN. What in blazes have I got to do with this here house? And who are you? What do you want out of me? Where are we going?

TRIVET. Your prince has appointed me—his most reliable official—to be your servant as of today; and to answer your last question, we are going exactly to where we have arrived.

ROBIN. Reliable official or rogue, you're dismissed and I'm going home.

TRIVET *(stopping him)*. Just a moment!

ROBIN. What's that? Hey, ain't it rude to stop your master? Hey?

TRIVET. Let the two of us come to an understanding.

ROBIN. Why? Have we got anything to tell one another?

TRIVET. We have. About Sylvia.

ROBIN. Ah, Sylvia, ah me! I beg your forgiveness. It comes to me now that I've wanted to talk to you all along.

TRIVET. You lost her two days ago, didn't you?

ROBIN. That's right. She was stolen by a pack of masked thieves.

TRIVET (*mysteriously*). I know where she is.

ROBIN. You know where she is, my friend, my valet, my master, my anything you like? Oh, what a pity I ain't rich, I'd give you all my income for wages. Tell me which way I should turn, my true-hearted friend—to the right, to the left, or straight ahead?

TRIVET. You'll meet her right here.

ROBIN. How good and kind you must be to have brung me here! Oh, Sylvia, sweetest child of my heart, I'm crying for joy!

TRIVET (*aside*). This fool's prelude bodes no good. (*Aloud*) Wait—I've something else to tell you.

ROBIN. First I want to see Sylvia; take pity on me, I can't wait.

TRIVET. I told you that you'll be seeing her; but before you do I must have a talk with you. Do you remember a gentleman who called on Sylvia in the village five or six times, and whom you saw in her company?

ROBIN. Yes. He looked like a sneak.

TRIVET. This person found your sweetheart very attractive.

ROBIN. He found nothing new, by crickety-crack.

TRIVET. And he told the prince about her, and the prince was impressed by his story.

ROBIN. I told you he looked like a sneak.

TRIVET. His Royal Highness wished to have a look at her, so he gave orders to have her brought here.

ROBIN. Good. Now that I'm here, let him return her to me and good-bye.

TRIVET. Not so fast. There's a small difficulty. Prince Poupon has fallen in love with Sylvia and intends to marry her.

ROBIN. Can't be done. She's in love with me and me with her, period.

TRIVET. You're missing the point; listen to the end.

ROBIN. You've reached the end already. Is somebody trying to swindle me out of my property?

TRIVET. Are you aware that the prince has decided to take a wife of humble but healthy origins?

ROBIN. No, I'm not aware, and I don't care.

TRIVET. I'm trying to inform you.

ROBIN. I don't care to be informed. I enjoy knowing nothin'.

TRIVET. Naturally, Sylvia's little obligation to you stands in the prince's way.

ROBIN. Let him pick another girl. There's dozens in the village with origins so healthy they never so much as sneeze.

TRIVET. That may be true. But our court astrologer, Dr. Vascularius, insists that Pouponaco needs an alliance between our prince and Sylvia. Are you ready to sacrifice your selfish interests to the future of our nation?

ROBIN. You're talkin' way above my pumpkin. I can tell you about hoof-and-mouth disease but I don't know crickety-crack about the future of the nation.

TRIVET. Let me spell things out for you; but keep it all to yourself, because what I'm going to reveal to you is a state secret. The house of the Poupons will perish—perish, do you hear? die out—if its Prince fails to restore it to health by marrying into the people. And the people in this instance happens to be Sylvia. What glory is in store for you, Master Robin! The lass you kissed by the village pump is fated to beget princes of the blood for a princely house that goes back to King Tutmose who built the pyramids!

ROBIN. That's nice. But I want my girl.

TRIVET. As for the grateful nation and its Prince, they will make you Count Robinet and bestow acres of land and cattle on you.

ROBIN. That's nice. But I want my girl.

TRIVET. And all you have to do is marry the most beautiful of the ladies in the palace.

ROBIN. That's nice. But I want my girl.

TRIVET. Keep in mind, besides, that Prince Poupon could have you strung up from the oaktree in the courtyard and do with Sylvia whatever he likes, with or without the blessings of the Church.

ROBIN. I'll take my chances; I've got a thick neck.

TRIVET. Finally, struggling is in vain. It's all been foretold in the stars. It's bound to happen, like it or not. It's written down in heaven.

ROBIN. In heaven they don't write that kind of drivel. Just to show you: supposing it was foretold that I would knock you down and stab



you in the back, would it make you happy if I fulfilled the prediction?

TRIVET. Certainly not! One should never injure one's betters.

ROBIN. Who is my betters? I thought I was Count Robinet.

TRIVET. Not yet, my lad. But you will be. With plenty of money to spend.

ROBIN. That's of no use to a man who has his health, a sound appetite, and a job.

TRIVET. Town house, country house ...

ROBIN. Who'll be living in my town house while I'm in my country house?

TRIVET. Your servants, of course.

ROBIN. My servants? I'm to get rich so those ruffians can enjoy themselves at my expense! But wait a minute: could I live in both houses at the same time?

TRIVET. I suppose not; you can't be in two places at once, you know.

ROBIN. Well then, you simpleton, what's the use of two houses?

TRIVET. Whenever you like, you'll go from one to the other.

ROBIN. So I should give up my Sylvia for the pleasure of moving every month?

TRIVET. Doesn't anything tempt you? Very strange. Anybody else would jump at these mansions, these servants—

ROBIN. All I need is a cottage; I don't like to support idlers; and I won't never find a servant more faithful to me and keener to serve me than me myself.

TRIVET. I admit you've got an attendant there you won't want to dismiss. But wouldn't you enjoy riding in a fine carriage drawn by the best horses, or being surrounded by luxurious furniture?

ROBIN. You are a great fool, my friend, to be comparing Sylvia with furniture and horses. What more can you do in a house than sit down, eat, and sleep? Give me a good bed, a solid table, a dozen straw-bottom chairs, and I'm as furnished and as comfortable as I want to be. Ah, but I ain't got a carriage! Well then, I won't tip over. (*Pointing to his legs*) And isn't this a team my mother gave me? Ain't they sound legs? As God is my witness, this carriage of mine ought to be good enough for you too. Away, you loafers! Turn your horses over to honest farmers what needs 'em. We'll all have bread on our tables, you'll walk, and the gout won't bite you.

TRIVET. Sharp! Sharp! If you had your way, there wouldn't be shoes enough to supply the world.

ROBIN. Let the world wear clogs. I've had enough of your chatter. You promised to produce Sylvia, and an honest man keeps his word.

TRIVET. Just a moment. You don't care for honors, riches, handsome houses, reputation, carriages—

ROBIN. All frippery—

TRIVET. But what about good food? Would that tempt you? Would you enjoy a cellar full of the best wines? Would you rejoice in a chef who prepared expert and plentiful dinners for you? Picture to yourself, if you please, the most savory meats and seafood: they're yours, and for a lifetime ... You're not answering me.

ROBIN. What you're talkin' about now sounds better nor all the rest because I admit I'm a glutton, but all the same my heart is bigger than my stomach.

TRIVET. Come, come, Count Robinet, be a happy man, leave one girl and take another.

ROBIN. No. I'll stick to plain Robin, Sylvia, ham and eggs and a jug of beer.

TRIVET. Alas for the wines you would have drunk, the morsels you would have tasted!

ROBIN. I'm sorry, but that's how it is. The best morsel of all is Sylvia. Are you or are you not going to show her to me? My stick is beginning to itch.

TRIVET. She's coming, don't worry. Only it's a bit early yet in the morning.

*(Enter Lisa in a glamorous décolleté)*

LISA. Oh, there you are, Mr. Trivet. The prince is asking for you.

TRIVET. The prince? I'm off. Why don't you keep Count Robinet company while I'm gone?

LISA *(softly)*. If he will allow me.

ROBIN. There's no need; I'm pretty good company to myself when I'm alone.

TRIVET. Oh no, you might get bored. *(Fake aside to Robin)* The very woman I was telling you about. Lucky dog! I wish we could exchange

places. Yum, yum, yum. I hope she doesn't turn you down. (*Aloud*) I mustn't let the prince wait.

(*Exit Trivet*)

ROBIN (*to himself*). Let's watch her pitchin' herself at me.

LISA (*softly*). Sir, aren't you our dear Miss Sylvia's suitor?

ROBIN (*coldly*). I am.

LISA. She's very pretty.

ROBIN (*as before*). She is.

LISA. And enviable.

ROBIN. Why enviable? Because the prince wants to steal her from me?

LISA. No, that's not the reason.

ROBIN. Well, what's the reason?

LISA. Because she is adored by a person—a person—well—a person like yourself.

ROBIN. Oh, I ain't so special.

LISA. And modest too! We've all heard about your prowesses in the village.

ROBIN. As how I wrestled Hulking Tom to the ground at the fair?

LISA. Oh yes. But I'm not surprised. Such biceps, such sinews! May I? (*She comes very close to him and feels his biceps*) Goodness gracious! Our effeminate courtiers would give gold for these muscles. Lucky Sylvia! What else did you triumph in at the fair?

ROBIN. I won the footrace, that's all. The prize was a piglet.

LISA. With legs like yours, no wonder. (*She feels his leg muscles*) Hercules!

ROBIN. Hey! Hold off there!

LISA. I meant no harm, dear Robin. But would you do something very particular for me?

ROBIN. I doubt it, but go ahead and ask.

LISA (*aside*). What a beast! (*Aloud*) Lady Grissini has invited a small, select company to a party tonight in her wing of the palace. Would you consent to be my escort? The prince's wardrobe will be at your disposal, so we'll make a stunning couple, you and I.

ROBIN. Thank you, but the girl I'm escortin' to any party is Sylvia.

LISA. Of course Sylvia comes first! But she was asked by Baron Belair, and having watched your love-bird cooing at the baron, I don't think she refused him.

ROBIN. Yes she did, yes she did! You're slandering her, that's what. Look here, Miss Lisa, you're nothin' but a—a Scarlet Woman.

LISA. Are you aware that this is no way for a man to speak to a lady? You're insulting me.

ROBIN. Why? It's the truth. There's too much sugar in your words for me, and nastiness about Sylvia. If I've turned your head because I'm sturdy and good-lookin', say good-bye right now so you can recover, because I'm spoken for, you know, and besides, I don't want no girl makin' advances at me, I want to make 'em myself. On top o' that, I'm no dummy, and I know why the prince is throwin' you at me. So I say shame, young lady, shame!

LISA. This is too absurd for words!

ROBIN. How can young men stand them fancy airs at court? God, but a woman's ugly when she's a flirt!

LISA. My poor man, you're raving.

ROBIN. You talk about Sylvia. *There's* charm for you! If I told you about our love, you'd be amazed to hear how shy she is. You should have seen how she avoided me the first days; and then how she avoided me a tiny bit less; and then, little by little, how she stopped avoiding me at all; and next how she gave me shy looks; and then how she was ashamed when I caught her doin' it; and how I was happy as a king to see her shame; and then how I snatched her hand, and how she allowed me to hold it; and then how she blushed; and how I talked to her; and how she wouldn't say a word, though I could see she was thinkin'; and then how she gave me looks instead of words, and then words she let go without knowing what happened, because her heart went faster than herself. There wasn't no touching after a first meeting, let me tell you.

LISA. You're very amusing. I'm laughing. Ha, ha, ha.

ROBIN. Me too. Ha, ha, ha. And now good-bye. If everybody was like me, you'd catch a white crow before finding a lover.

*(Enter Trivet)*

TRIVET. How is the happy couple doing?

LISA. It seems that I'm a scarlet woman, while Sylvia is a pink angel.

ROBIN. I'm off to look for her, because I'm suspicious that you're keepin' her hidden from me.

*(Exit Robin)*

TRIVET. Wait for me, Master Robin! There's a big lunch being prepared for you in the kitchen!

*(Exit Trivet)*

LISA. Good riddance to the clown; let him return to his piglets; but I'm as penniless as before.

*(Enter the prince and Flaminia)*

PRINCE. Well, are we making progress? Have you got Robin snug in your nest?

LISA. To make a long story short, your highness, Robin heard me out and when I was done he ran looking for his Sylvia.

FLAMINIA. I hope he wasn't rude to you.

LISA. Oh no. "Shame, young lady, you are a tramp"; and "You'll catch a white crow before you find a lover". That's his style.

PRINCE. I'm sorry to hear this, Lisa; but don't be chagrined; you've lost nothing in my eyes. If the future of the house of Poupon didn't require me to look down rather than up—or sideways—

LISA. Thank you, my lord; a compliment doesn't come amiss, for now I have proof that I can be disliked. It's a proof we women prefer to live without.

FLAMINIA. My lord, will you allow me to remark that your plan has failed?

PRINCE. Of course it has. How tiresome! What! Am I to force the girl into my bed at dagger's point? I who hate melodrama?

LISA. You should do it.

PRINCE. Nonsense. My heirs must be legitimate.

FLAMINIA. Well, my lord, I can see that it's my turn to try.

PRINCE. I don't know. I'm discouraged. And to think I have to look cheerful this afternoon when I review the Guard!

FLAMINIA. Don't give up, my lord. Have faith in your Flaminia. But first: sister, will you yield Robin to me?

LISA. Yield him to you? Yes! Take him away as far as possible!

FLAMINIA. I like him and what's more, I intend to marry him. Surprised? I'm not a nun, you know, and older sisters ought to marry before younger ones. The Bible says so. Our brawny Robin suits me perfectly, though I may have to teach him a subtlety or two—suits me, that is, if you, my lord, will keep the promises you made to Lisa.

PRINCE. I will, and then do even more!

FLAMINIA. In that case, consider it all settled. You don't know me, my lord. Do you think for a minute that Robin and Sylvia can hold out against me? That I am incapable of regulating hearts like theirs? Sylvia must consent, and you shall beget upon her as many rugged princelings as you desire. Wait, I hear a dulcet voice; it's Sylvia's; she is whispering "I love you, my own Poupon." I see the wedding—there, before my eyes, sweet vision!—you're man and wife. Count Robinet marries me. He and I take possession of the grounds you will bestow upon us. And Lisa marries the nobleman of her choice. End of story.

LISA. End of story? It hasn't even begun!

FLAMINIA. Silence, heretic. My first step is to call Sylvia; the time has come for her to be reunited with Robin.

LISA. Your vision will fall apart the moment they find each other again.

PRINCE. I think so too.

FLAMINIA. Splendid: we differ only over yes or no; nothing worth mentioning. Meantime, I've decided they'll see each other as often as they please. This is the first of several traps I intend to set for their love.

PRINCE. Well, do as you like. I feel a vile headache coming on. The burdens a prince has to bear! As Shakespeare observes—

FLAMINIA. Yes, my lord. But I hear Robin and Trivet. Let's vanish.

*(They leave. Enter Robin and Trivet)*

ROBIN (*looking back off-stage*). The six of you! Stay where you are, you clowns and loafers, or go look for Sylvia! (*To Trivet*) Will you tell me why these uniformed gallows-birds are following me about? I can't lift a finger without being watched.

TRIVET. This is our prince's way of showing his regard for you. He wants these men to follow you in your honor.

ROBIN. Oh, you mean it's a honor to be followed?

TRIVET. Absolutely.

ROBIN. And tell me, who follows the men who are following me?

TRIVET. Nobody.

ROBIN. And you don't have nobody following you neither?

TRIVET. No, I don't.

ROBIN. You mean you people are not honored?

TRIVET. We don't deserve to be.

ROBIN (*showing his stick*). If that's the case, clear out! And take the whole crew with you! Away!

TRIVET. Why? What do you mean?

ROBIN. Get out! I don't like folk who don't deserve to be honored.

TRIVET. You don't understand me!

ROBIN (*beating him*). I'll talk more clearly.

TRIVET. Stop, stop, what are you doing?

(*Trivet takes refuge in the wings*)

ROBIN. Scum! I don't seem to be able to discharge 'em. Is this how they honor a good man, by making a gang of rascals dog his footsteps? Who do they take me for? (*He sees Trivet again*) Haven't I made myself clear as yet, my friend?

TRIVET (*from a distance*). Let me speak, Sir Robin. You've beaten me black and blue, but I'll forgive you. You're not unreasonable, are you?

ROBIN. Not when I don't wanna be.

TRIVET. Our orders from the prince are to stay with you.

ROBIN. You can stay with me if you take me to Sylvia.

TRIVET. But that's just what I was about to do when you started pummeling me, your best friend. Look. Here she comes.

(*Enter Sylvia and Flaminia*)

SYLVIA (*running joyfully to Robin*). There he is! Oh, dearest, sweetest Robin, it's you! I'm seeing you again! My poor boy! Oh, I'm so happy!

ROBIN (*breathless*). And so am I. Oh, oh, oh, I'm dying, I'm too happy.

SYLVIA. There, there, my love, gently. How much he loves me; how wonderful to be loved like this.

FLAMINIA. My dear children, I'm overjoyed to see you so faithful to one another. (*False aside to Trivet*) I'm ruined if anybody hears me. But I can't help myself, my heart goes out to them.

TRIVET (*playing along*). I warn you not to betray our beloved prince.

ROBIN. Get out, you rascal, before I twist you into a pretzel.

TRIVET. I'm only doing my duty.

(*He runs away*)

SYLVIA. Oh, Robin, how wretched I've been.

ROBIN. Do you still love me?

SYLVIA. Do I still love you! Is that a question you should ask?

FLAMINIA. Oh, I'll bear witness to her love. I've seen her in despair, wailing over your absence. I almost cried with her. I couldn't wait to see you together, even if it costs me my prince's favor; and here you are. Good-bye, my friends; I'm leaving you, because you bring tears to my eyes. Alas, you remind me of my love for someone—someone who perished fighting for our prince.... He had something of Robin's expression. I'll never forget him. Good-bye, Sylvia; I've been assigned to keep watch over you, but you can count on me. Love Robin, he deserves it. And you, Robin, whatever happens, look on me as a friend, a person who wishes to be of use to you.

ROBIN. You're a dear, and I'm your friend too. I'm so sorry your sweetheart got perished. I see you're unhappy, and so are we.

(*Flaminia leaves*)

SYLVIA (*plaintively*). Well, Robin, my love?

ROBIN. Well, Sylvia, my soul?



SYLVIA. How unhappy we are!

ROBIN. Let us love each other always; that will help us be patient.

SYLVIA. Yes, but what is going to happen to our love? I'm so worried. The prince is trying to inveigle me with all kinds of luxuries so he can rejuvenate Pouponaco or whatever.

ROBIN. And he's throwing titles and vamps at me in order to separate us.

SYLVIA. What? Are you going to leave me? Will you get used to life without your little Sylvia?

ROBIN. My dove, would I get used to fasting?

SYLVIA. I don't want you to forget me, but neither do I want you to suffer because of me. Who knows what the brutes will do to you? I love you too much, I'm in a daze, everything makes me wretched.

ROBIN (*crying*). Ay ay ay ay!

SYLVIA. Now I'm going to cry, too.

ROBIN. How can I stop crying when I see you so anxious? You wouldn't be shedding these tears if you pitied me.

SYLVIA. Hush; I won't tell you anymore that I'm unhappy.

ROBIN. But I'll guess the truth. Please promise to be cheerful.

SYLVIA. I promise. But you must promise to love me forever.

ROBIN. I'll love you, and nothing will shake my love, as long as there's a breath left in my body. I'm yours and you're mine, do you hear? Shall I take an oath? Tell me what to say.

SYLVIA. I don't know any oaths, and I trust you without them. And you can trust me too. All my love is yours. Who else should have any particle of it? Let's remain just as we are, and forget all about oaths.

ROBIN. In a hundred years we'll be the same as now.

SYLVIA. The very same.

ROBIN. And we'll show 'em this very night. Seems there's a party tonight to which a select few is invited, meaning you and me. I'll be your escort, and you'll be mine.

SYLVIA. Dear me! I promised a gentleman—but that was before you arrived. (*Merrily*) He'll just have to go by himself now that you're with me.

ROBIN. I knew it! You see? After a little misery, pleasure tastes all the sweeter.

SYLVIA. And yet I could manage to be happy without any misery at all.

ROBIN. How can I be miserable when you look at me as you're looking now?

SYLVIA. And where have you learned to say all these lovely things? There's only one of you in this world, and only one of me to love you.

ROBIN. Oh, the honey of your words!

*(Enter Trivet and Flaminia)*

TRIVET. It breaks my heart to interrupt this duet, young lady, but your mother has arrived by courtesy of our generous prince, and wishes to see you right away.

SYLVIA. Don't leave me, Robin. I have no secrets for you.

ROBIN *(taking her arm)*. Let's go, my love.

FLAMINIA. Go meet your mother by yourself, dear Sylvia, it's more proper that way. Trust me—I have seen to it that you're both free to meet as much as you like.

ROBIN. Thank God, you're on our side. All right, dearest, go see your mammy, tell her I'm keepin' that sack of onions for her as promised.

SYLVIA. Very well, I'll go alone. Wait for me, my dear. Perhaps Flaminia will keep you company.

FLAMINIA. I don't know if I can .... But don't worry about Robin.

TRIVET *(to Sylvia)*. I'll show you where your mammy is waiting for you.

*(Exeunt Sylvia and Trivet. Flaminia pretends to leave the other way)*

ROBIN. Where are you going? Sylvia is right. Why don't you stay and distract me a little while she's gone? You're the only person I can stand to be with in this house.

FLAMINIA *(as though confidentially)*. My dear Robin, I enjoy your company too, but I'm afraid *somebody* might notice how much I like you. And speaking of the devil, there he is again.

*(Re-enter Trivet.)*

TRIVET. Sir Robin, dinner is being served.

ROBIN *(gloomily)*. I'm not hungry.

FLAMINIA. You must eat, I want you to, you need it.

ROBIN. Do you think so?

FLAMINIA. I do.

ROBIN. I don't believe I can swallow a morsel. (*To Trivet*) What's on for a start?

TRIVET. A gorgeous minestrone full of goulash.

ROBIN. Hm. We'd better wait for Sylvia. She likes a hearty soup.

FLAMINIA. I think she'll eat with her mother. You're the master, of course, but I advise you to leave them together, and to see her after dinner.

ROBIN. If you say so; but my appetite ain't ready yet.

TRIVET. The wine bottle has been uncorked, and the roast sits on the table.

ROBIN. I'm so depressed.... Roast what?

TRIVET. Roast mutton swimming in gravy.

ROBIN. So much grief.... Well, let's go. It'd be a sin to let the meat get cold.

FLAMINIA. Don't forget to drink to my health.

ROBIN. What do you mean? You're comin' with me, by crickety-crack, and we'll drink to each other's healths and loves. Why are you hesitating?

FLAMINIA. You know why. (*To Trivet*) Will you promise not to tattle to the prince?

TRIVET. What about my loyalty oath to the Poupons?

ROBIN. I pummeled your backside before; now it's the turn of your ugly face.

TRIVET (*running away*). I'll be keeping an eye on you, Flaminia!

FLAMINIA. Oh the villain! And would you believe that he pretends to be in love with me?

ROBIN. In love with you? Let's drown him in that bottle of wine.

## ACT TWO

*(The next day. Enter Sylvia and Flaminia)*

SYLVIA. Yes, I believe you. I think you do wish me well. That's why you're the only person I can endure in the palace; all the others I look on as my enemies, especially that vamp Miss Lisa whom the prince is throwing at Robin. But by the way, where is Robin?

FLAMINIA. He'll soon be here; he's still at table.

SYLVIA. What a miserable place this is! Never have I seen such polite ladies and gentlemen. Oh, the sweet manners, the bowing and curtsying, the compliments, the promises! You'd think they were the kindest people in the world. But not a bit! Because there isn't a single one who fails to whisper into my ear, "Miss Sylvia, believe me, you ought to give up Robin and marry the prince." And all this, mind you, without shame, in the most natural manner, as though they were urging me to do a good deed. "But I'm pledged to Robin," say I; "where's constancy, integrity, good faith?" That they don't understand; it's Greek to them; they laugh in my face, they tell me that I'm behaving like a baby, that a grown-up girl ought to show more sense. Pretty, isn't it? Who are these people? Where do they come from? What clay are they made of?

FLAMINIA. Of the same clay as everybody, my dear Sylvia. Don't let it surprise you. And yet—they are also thinking about the future of Pouponaco; don't forget that; they love our country.

SYLVIA. But shouldn't a girl be faithful? Isn't that more important than all this palaver about the future of the country? More than that, isn't my faithfulness one of my charms?

FLAMINIA. Oh, it is! And I wish that Robin were back from dinner in order to hear you speak.

SYLVIA. Why doesn't the prince take a girl for his wife who is a real farmgirl? He forgets that I've gone to school, and that the nuns taught me how to read and write and speak and behave like a lady. Between you and me, my mother has just finished telling me for the twentieth time that I'm above Robin. Of course that doesn't matter to me in the

least, but it proves that the prince shouldn't have picked me for his plans. He's wasting these concerts and plays, these dinners as lavish as wedding feasts, these jewels he keeps sending me. They must cost him huge sums, it's an abyss, he's ruining himself, and I ask you, what does he gain? If he gave me a whole dress shop, I wouldn't be as happy as with a ball of yarn I got from Robin on my last birthday.

FLAMINIA. I know. I've been in love too, and I see myself in that ball of yarn. That is why I'm so sorry for that lovely gentleman, Baron Belair, who is obviously smitten with you.

SYLVIA (*blushing*). Please don't mention him.

FLAMINIA. Why not? Has he offended you?

SYLVIA. Oh no! He's as sweet and handsome and genteel as a gentleman can be. Such refinements! And such white, soft, slender hands! Robin is lucky that— (*she stops*)

FLAMINIA. That what?

SYLVIA. Nothing.

FLAMINIA. Incidentally, I thought the baron looked very unhappy when he saw you holding hands with Robin at Lady Grissini's soirée last night.

SYLVIA. I noticed too.

FLAMINIA. And did you notice that I went over to him and made him dance with me? I think I managed to cheer him up.

SYLVIA. I didn't think so, not at all. But where is the prince all this time? How truly strange that he is hiding from me, as if I were the princess and he a village boy.

FLAMINIA. Prince Poupon is awfully shy, and terribly afraid you will not like him.

SYLVIA. Well, he's right to be afraid. Let him forget about his silly project and choose a wife in the palace, which is brimful with women who know how to flutter their eyes and pucker their mouths. They're far more attractive than a bashful thing like myself that doesn't dare look at people and that blushes if somebody says she's pretty.

FLAMINIA. Don't waste your breath praising our women, my dear, because they're miles away from praising you.

SYLVIA. Oh? What do they say?

FLAMINIA. They ridicule you, they taunt the prince, they ask him how is his rustic beauty. "Have you ever seen such a common face?" I

heard one of them say yesterday. Then another one of them cried out, "Why isn't she in the kitchen downstairs churning butter?" and everybody laughed. Then somebody criticized your eyes, somebody else the way you walk, the way you talk—what do I know? I was so furious I could have choked!

SYLVIA (*angry*). How I despise these women! If I'm such a clod of a girl, why did the prince select me of all the girls he could have chosen?

FLAMINIA. Oh, they're sure he'll send you back to the village before the week is over. He'll come back to his senses, they say. How I wish you could get even with these backbiters!

SYLVIA. So do I. It's lucky for them I'm in love with Robin; otherwise I'd show up these vipers.

FLAMINIA. And wouldn't they deserve it! I've told them: "You're doing all you can to get Sylvia dismissed and to take her place in the prince's heart; but if she were so inclined, she'd wiggle her little finger at him and he'd follow her to Timbuctoo."

SYLVIA. At least you know the truth; I could crush them if I wanted to. But I'm not interested in the prince.

FLAMINIA. Hush—here's somebody coming.

SYLVIA. Oh my God, it's Baron Belair! I asked him for pity's sake to stay away from me.

*(Enter the prince as Baron Belair, with Lisa as a lady-in-waiting. The prince bows to Sylvia)*

PRINCE. Forgive me for intruding upon you, Miss Sylvia. You asked me, alas, to stay away from you; and indeed, I wouldn't have dared to come if Miss Lisa hadn't asked me to escort her. She has obtained the prince's permission to pay her respects to you.

*(Lisa and Flaminia exchange winks)*

SYLVIA (*gently*). I'm not unhappy to see you again, though I'm in low spirits just now. As for Miss Lisa, about whom I am well informed, I'm obliged to her for wishing to pay her respects to me. I don't deserve them, but if she wants to curtsy to me, let her go about it

and I'll return the compliment as best I can; she'll excuse me if I do it badly.

LISA. Yes, my dear, I'll excuse you with all my heart; I don't ask for what's impossible. (*She curtsies*)

SYLVIA (*aside*). The slut! (*She curtsies*)

LISA. Where did you learn such exquisite manners, my child?

SYLVIA. In my village, mother.

FLAMINIA (*to Sylvia*). Good.

PRINCE. My dear lady, under pretext of paying a respectful call, you're abusing Miss Sylvia.

LISA. That wasn't my intention, I assure you. I was only anxious to see the little girl who has turned you-know-whose head. Perhaps I can find the secret of her charm. I'm told she's naive, and I suppose this creates an amusing pastoral effect. I should dearly love to see her dancing a country jig for us.

SYLVIA. I will oblige, madam, on the day you marry Robin.

LISA. Robin, my dear, is worthy only of you.

PRINCE (*to Lisa*). Enough! Another word, and I will report these insinuations to our prince.

LISA. I'm going. I only wanted to see for myself with what sort of creature the prince wanted to debase his bed.

(*Exit Lisa*)

SYLVIA. Creature! Debase! If she hadn't left, I swear I would have scratched out her eyes.

FLAMINIA. Insults from her kind should be taken as compliments.

PRINCE. My beautiful Sylvia, this woman has misled both the prince and myself. Shocking behavior! You know my feelings for you; you know how deeply I respect you. The truth is that I came here to drink in with my eyes a person dearer to me than life itself, and to acknowledge in you—as unhappily I must—our future sovereign. But I shouldn't let myself go. Flaminia is listening; and you belong to someone else.

FLAMINIA. No harm done! Don't I know a person can't see her without loving her?

SYLVIA. All the same, I'd rather he didn't love me, because I'm sorry I can't reciprocate, truly sorry.

PRINCE. How kind you are, Sylvia! And how unfortunate I am! What is the love I offer you, what are the possessions I would spread at your feet, when I have two happy rivals flanking me, one humble and the other royal?

SYLVIA. The royal one need give you no concern. And you have my permission to love me, that's settled. I'll enjoy it, besides, provided you promise to take your grief patiently; because that's the best I can do for you. Robin came first, you know; nothing else stands in your way. If you had been beforehand—but what good are these ifs? Bad luck will have it so. You're unhappy, and I'm none too happy myself.

PRINCE. You be the judge, Flaminia. How can a man stop loving her? So tender, so generous! I had rather be pitied by Sylvia than adored by any other woman.

SYLVIA. I'll let you judge too, Flaminia. What should a girl do with a man who thanks her no matter what she says?

FLAMINIA. I would fall in love with him, that's what!

SYLVIA. Don't make things worse for us. (*To the prince*) Do try to love me peacefully, will you—but help me get even with that woman.

PRINCE. I'll do it at once, my beloved Sylvia. As for me, I don't care how you treat me, my mind is made up, and if our prince obtains your hand, I shall still have the pleasure of adoring you as long as I live.

SYLVIA. Oh, I'm sure of you. I trust you.

FLAMINIA. Go now, my dear baron; inform the prince against the lady in question. Let everybody comply with the respect we owe our Sylvia.

PRINCE. You'll hear from me presently.

*(Exit the prince)*

FLAMINIA. And I'll go look for Robin, whom somebody must be keeping at table.

SYLVIA. When Robin sits at table, he doesn't need anybody to keep him there.

FLAMINIA. So I've noticed. In the meantime, why don't you try the brocaded dress that was made for you? I can't wait to see it on you.

SYLVIA. I'm sure it will fit me; and it's a lovely material. But I'd rather not take these dresses. The prince wants me in exchange, and



that's a bargain I'll never agree to.

FLAMINIA. You're wrong there. Even if you keep refusing him, everything will still be yours. Really, you don't know our generous Prince Poupon.

SYLVIA. If you say so. But I hope he doesn't ask me afterwards, "Why did you take my presents?"

FLAMINIA. He'll ask you, "Why didn't you take more of them?"

SYLVIA. Very well: I'll help myself to as many presents as he likes; that way he won't be able to upbraid me.

FLAMINIA. Carry on. I'll answer for everything.

*(Exit Sylvia)*

FLAMINIA. Things are beginning to fall into place. I'd better go look for—but here he comes. If this magnificent hunk were to fall in love with me, and bring myself and Lisa an estate, I could forgive my father for ruining us at the roulette table.

*(Enter Robin, laughing, with Trivet)*

ROBIN. Ha, ha, ha! Hello, Flaminia.

FLAMINIA. Hello, Robin. Tell me why you're laughing, so I can laugh along with you.

ROBIN. Trivet's been showing me about the house. I noticed a tall rascal lifting a lady's dress from behind. Now here's a prank, says I to myself, and I tell him straight off, "Stop it, you low scamp; this trifling is indecent." But the lady overhears me. She turns around and says, "Can't you see he's carrying my train?" "You mean he's carrying your tail," says I. That's when the rascal started to laugh, then the lady fell to laughing, Trivet laughed, everybody was laughing; so to keep 'em company I decided to laugh too. But now I want to ask you, what was we all laughing about?

FLAMINIA. About nothing. You don't happen to know that what this lackey was doing was done according to custom.

ROBIN. You mean it was another honor?

FLAMINIA. That's right.

ROBIN. Well, I'm glad I laughed. It's a funny honor, by God, and a cheap one, too.

FLAMINIA. You're in a good mood. That's how I like to see you. How was your meal?

ROBIN. God love me! I wish you had seen the tasty concoctions! And the cook's fricassee! There's no fighting that cook. I drank so many healths to Sylvia and you, it won't be my fault if you ever get sick.

FLAMINIA. What? Did you think of me at all?

ROBIN. Once I've given my friendship to a person, I never forget it, especially at table. But what about Sylvia, has she gone to see her mother again?

TRIVET. Oh, Sir Robin, still thinking about Sylvia?

ROBIN. Hold your tongue when your master speaks.

FLAMINIA. You're overstepping the bounds, Trivet.

TRIVET. Me, overstepping the bounds?

FLAMINIA. That's right. Why do you try to keep Robin from talking about his darling girl?

TRIVET. His darling girl is it? I'm beginning to see how much you care for the prince's interests.

FLAMINIA (*as though frightened*). Robin, that man is going to make trouble for me on your account.

ROBIN (*angry*). No, my sweet, he won't. (*To Trivet*) Look here, I'm your overlord, you said so yourself, I didn't know a thing about it. Well, you loafer, if I catch you tattling, and if they so much as say boo to this fine girl, you'll be short two ears; I'll have 'em in my pocket.

TRIVET. I'll live without my ears, but do my duty.

ROBIN. Two ears! Can they still hear me? And now clear out.

TRIVET. I will; but as for you, Flaminia, you'll be paying the fiddler.

*(Robin threatens him, Flaminia stops Robin, and Trivet leaves)*

ROBIN. This is too much. No sooner do I find an honest person in this house than some busybody sticks his nose into our conversation. But now, my dear Flaminia, let's talk about Sylvia as much as we like. It's only when I'm in your company that I can stand to be away from her.

FLAMINIA. How sweet of you! There's nothing I wouldn't do to make both of you happy. And you, well, you're already so dear to me that when I see anybody upsetting you, I suffer as much as you do.

ROBIN. How sweet of *you*! I feel calmer when you pity me. Already I'm only half as sorry to be miserable as I was before.

FLAMINIA. Who wouldn't pity you? Who wouldn't be interested in your fate? You don't realize what you're worth, Robin.

ROBIN. That's possible, you know. I've never taken that close a look.

FLAMINIA. It's terrible to be so powerless! If you could read into my heart!

ROBIN. What a shame; I can't read; but you'll explain it to me. I swear I'd like to be rid of my grief if only out of consideration for the way you worry about it; but everything will be settled by and by, you'll see.

FLAMINIA (*in a sad voice*). No, I'll never be a witness to your happiness; it's all over for me. Trivet is going to denounce me, I'll be taken away from you. Who knows to what faraway land I'll be exiled? Perhaps I'm speaking to you for the last time, Robin, and there'll be no pleasure left for me in this world.

ROBIN. For the last time! Oh, I was born under a wicked star! I had one only love, they took her away, and now are they going to swindle me out of you too? Is this the way to treat a loyal Pouponian? Have they decided to kill me? Are they savages?

FLAMINIA. Whatever happens, I hope you won't forget Flaminia, who desired nothing so much as your happiness.

ROBIN. My dear good girl, you've won my heart. Advise me in my distress; let's put our heads together; what do you propose? I'm not very bright when I'm angry. Sure I love Sylvia, but I have to keep you too. My love shouldn't knock out our friendship, no more than our friendship should nibble at my love; and here I am all tangled up.

FLAMINIA. And here I am all unhappy! From the time I lost the man I loved, I've been at peace only in your company; with you I've revived a little. You're so much like him, sometimes I think he is speaking again. I've never liked anyone except him and you.

ROBIN. Poor girl! How inconvenient for you that I'm in love with Sylvia; otherwise I'd gladly offer you the likeness of your poor sweetheart. I guess he was a good-looking fellow.

FLAMINIA. Didn't I tell you he was just like you? You're his living portrait, except so much stronger.

ROBIN. And you was crazy about him?

FLAMINIA. Look at yourself, Robin; see how much you deserve to be loved, and you'll understand how much I loved him.

ROBIN. Can a body answer more sweetly? Every word you say is downright friendly. I'd never have guessed I was that handsome; but since you loved the copy of me so well, I've got to believe that the original is pretty fair, too.

FLAMINIA. Life is so hard! And if only I hadn't been too homely to deserve either one of you.

ROBIN (*with fire*). Homely? Did you say homely? How dare you insult yourself like that! Don't take it lying down. Why, you're the most beautiful—I mean—you're a beauty—a regular goddess Aphrodisiac.

FLAMINIA. Stop, Robin, stop. I'm so troubled, I'd better leave you. It's hard, God knows, to tear myself away from you, but where would it all lead? Farewell. I must prepare myself for bitter exile. I don't know where I am.

ROBIN. Neither do I.

FLAMINIA. Seeing you gives me too much pleasure.

ROBIN. I haven't refused to give you that pleasure, have I? Look at me as long as you like, I'll give you look for look.

FLAMINIA. I don't dare. Adieu.

*(Exit Flaminia)*

ROBIN (*gazing after her*). She's too good for this place, by crickety-crack. If I had to lose Sylvia by some accident, God forbid, I think I'd take refuge with her in my despair.

*(Enter from another side Trivet in a long beard, disguised as Dr. Vascularius)*

TRIVET (*very deferential*). Dr. Robin, my respects. I hope I'm not troubling your repose. My name is Dr. Vascularius.

ROBIN. Where have I seen you before?

TRIVET. Nowhere, dear sir; we are strangers to one another.

ROBIN. No we ain't. I know it was you that advised the prince to marry my girl.

TRIVET. Advised him? Never! I was only reading the stars for his Royal Highness, and argue with them as much as we mortals will, they won't listen to reason. I humbly apologize for them.

ROBIN. Well, your stars are a pack of villains, so I won't hold them against you. What can I oblige you with?

TRIVET. I have come to beg a favor of you, Dr. Robin.

ROBIN. Always willin' to be of service.

TRIVET. I had the misfortune to speak lightly of you in the prince's presence.

ROBIN. You don't say! What did you tell him?

TRIVET. Oh, I only said—but ever so lightly—"I hear that Master Robin's grammar is not so highly developed as are his muscles."

ROBIN. Ha, ha, ha, ha! I like that! It's a fact that I don't exercise my grammar like I work out my arms and legs. What did the prince answer?

TRIVET. He became angry.

ROBIN. Good. He's an honest man; I'm glad. If he wasn't keeping my Sylvia from me, I'd be friends with him. But lemme hear what he said.

TRIVET. "Robin," he said, "is a man of honor. As I value him, I desire him to be respected. Grammar is for pedants like you, Vascularius. Instead, the frankness and simplicity of Robin's character are qualities I should wish to find in all of you. I stand in the way of his love, and it grieves me to the soul that a higher duty to our nation compels me to injure him."

ROBIN (*overcome*). Bless my heart, I'm beginning to take a fancy to the dear man, and I'm not half as mad at him as I thought I was.

TRIVET. Alas, my reply to his reply made matters worse for me.

ROBIN. Things are warming up, eh? What was your reply to his reply?

TRIVET. I said—but still ever so lightly, so very lightly!—that the prince shouldn't stand on ceremony and marry you off to the village crone.

ROBIN. The village crone is it? Old Pamela Brittleback? Where's my stick?

*(Trivet throws himself at Robin's feet)*

TRIVET. Dear Dr. Robin, hear me out, I beg you! The prince is going to dismiss me from his service if you don't intercede for me.

ROBIN. Intercede for you! Ask the planets to intercede for you! Because *I'm* about to beat you black and blue.

TRIVET. Don't, Dr. Robin; wait, wait! You like Flaminia, don't you?

ROBIN. Hold your tongue! What's Flaminia got to do with this? Get up!

TRIVET. Flaminia is very poor, you know; her father ruined her before he decided to die. If you are kind enough to obtain my pardon, I will restore her fortune by marrying her to a wealthy cousin of mine who is court astrologer to the sultan of Mesopotamia.

ROBIN. Hang your cousin and your sultan! I won't have nobody marrying my friends from under me.

TRIVET. But I thought—

ROBIN. Stop thinking! Thinking will cost you a broken skull.

TRIVET. But what can I do to regain your friendship?

ROBIN. Stop talking about marrying people to people. And if you do, I give you my word of honor I'll make things right between you and the prince.

TRIVET. I promise to obey you, and I shall await the results of your embassy. Good day, Dr. Robin.

ROBIN. Your servant. *(Exit Trivet)* Well! I'm becoming a man of consequence; everybody obeys me, which feels pretty good. But I'd better not breathe a word to Flaminia about the cousin. There she is!

*(Enter Flaminia)*

FLAMINIA. My dear boy, I've brought Sylvia back to you. She just stopped for a moment to look at herself in a mirror.

ROBIN. That's your Sylvia for you! But why didn't you come sooner to tell me? We could have chatted while waiting for her.

*(Enter Sylvia)*

SYLVIA. Greetings, Robin dear. I've been trying on the most

beautiful dress! How pretty I looked in it! Ask Flaminia. If I chose to wear any of these dresses and jewels, we'd see who was too clumsy to please anybody. But I'll say this—they have the cleverest seamstresses here.

ROBIN. My love, they're not as clever as you're tasty.

SYLVIA. If I'm tasty, Robin, you're very gallant to say so.

FLAMINIA. I'm glad to see you both a little happier now.

SYLVIA. Why not? As long as no one bothers us, and the prince stays out of the way, I'd as soon be here as any other place.

ROBIN. I'd like to see anybody bother us! They're sendin' people in to me on their knees left and right because they made some unrefined remark about me.

SYLVIA. To me too. I'm waiting right now for that wretched Miss Lisa, who has been ordered to repent before my eyes for calling me a village girl.

FLAMINIA. If anybody vexes you from now on, let me know.

ROBIN. Oh yes, Flaminia loves us both like a sister. (*To Flaminia*) And it's tit for tat as far as we're concerned.

SYLVIA. Oh, that reminds me. I want you to be friends with Baron Belair—you know the gentleman I mean; because he's been very kind as well.

ROBIN. Tit for that, I say, tit for tat.

SYLVIA. After all, what harm is there in his liking me? When all's said and done, the people who love us are better company than those who don't.

FLAMINIA. Quite right.

ROBIN. Let's add Flaminia, in that case; she cares for us; and that'll make a foursome.

FLAMINIA. It's a friendly thought I'll never forget, Robin.

ROBIN. Well, since we're all together, let's have a snack to cheer us up.

SYLVIA. You go, Robin. Now that we can meet as much as we like, we needn't be in each other's way. Don't worry about me.

ROBIN. All right. Are you coming, Flaminia? I hate to eat by myself.

FLAMINIA. I'll join you, especially as somebody is coming who'll keep Sylvia company.

*(Exeunt Robin and Flaminia. Enter Lisa from another side. She makes a number of ceremonious curtsies to Sylvia)*

SYLVIA. Not quite so many curtsies, madam, so I won't be obliged to return them. You fancy me too awkward to perform them, I know.

LISA *(in a sad voice)*. Your merits have spoken here.

SYLVIA. Not for long, I'm sure, because I'm not putting myself out to impress anyone. I'm rather sorry to be as good-looking as I am, and I'm sorry you're not quite pretty enough.

LISA. Ah, what a situation!

SYLVIA. Here you are sighing because of a little country girl. You're taking your time now—where have you left your tongue, madam? Do you lose your gift for prattling when it comes to making amends?

LISA. I can't begin to speak.

SYLVIA. Then don't. Because you can moan until tomorrow morning, but you won't change my looks; beautiful or ugly, my face will remain what it is. But what brings you here? Haven't you scolded me enough? Well then, finish me off, help yourself!

LISA. Spare me, Miss Sylvia; my outburst has brought trouble on my whole family. Baron Belair compels me to apologize to you, because he flies into a passion if someone so much as ruffles one of your curls. He said he would make a report of me to the prince if I didn't beg you to accept my excuses.

SYLVIA. It's all over; I'm no longer angry. I'm sorry for you and I forgive you. But why did you provoke me to begin with?

LISA. Perhaps you know that the prince had chosen me to be his wife before he met you. Then he wanted me to marry Robin in order to free you for himself. And Robin rejected me too. Of course I took it badly when I found out that true charm doesn't always gain the upper hand.

SYLVIA. While ugly faces and bad figures do, because the upper hand is mine! I unforgive you!

LISA. Very well, I admit I'm jealous. But since you don't care to be our princess, and since you're devoted to Robin, why not help me regain Poupon's affection? If he returns to me, you will be perfectly free to marry your sweetheart.



SYLVIA. Why don't you lure him back by means of your own true charm, as you call it? Because I advise you not to count on me.

LISA. You are very sharp with me. Well, I've apologized as much as is necessary, and now it's open war. The prince hasn't lost all his senses, nor have I lost all my power over him. And believe me, once I sit on the throne, you'll be going back to hoeing potatoes in the fields.

SYLVIA. Once you sit on the throne! Watch out! I'll speak to the prince. He hasn't dared come near me as yet, because I'm cross with him; but I'll let him know he can be a little bolder from now on.

LISA. Do so. In the meantime, I'll report to Belair that he had better forget his passion for you, since you're about to inveigle the prince on top of your Robin. Good day, madam, and remember me in your prayers.

SYLVIA. Go your way, I don't even know you're alive.

*(Exit Lisa one way, enter Flaminia by another)*

FLAMINIA. What's the matter, Sylvia? You look upset.

SYLVIA. I'm simply boiling. That impudent Lisa woman came again to apologize; and I don't know how the hussy went about it, but she managed to infuriate me again. I can't begin to tell you what-all she threw in my face! She even boasted that it was she who'd marry the prince!

FLAMINIA. Did she now! Oh what a pity that your attachment to Robin prevents you from putting her and all the other scandal-mongers in their place!

SYLVIA. You're right. And that reminds me. Where is the fellow? Every time I have news of him, he's sitting down to a meal, a drink or a snack.

FLAMINIA. Yes, I noticed it too. Please don't repeat my words, because we're talking among girls now. Tell me the truth, do you really love that boy so much?

SYLVIA. Oh yes, I do; I have to, you know.

FLAMINIA. Shall I tell you what I think? Confidentially now. You don't seem to be made for one another. You, Sylvia, have taste, intelligence, an air of breeding and distinction; while he—well, I don't want to spell out the obvious. Oh, he's a fine-looking lad and

truly unpretentious, but in all honesty I can't understand how you—well—I feel, like your mother, that perhaps you're lowering yourself. It's easy to guess at any rate that this is what Baron Belair believes, even though he's much too delicate to breathe a word of his inner thoughts.

SYLVIA. Put yourself in my place. Robin was the most likable boy of the district; and he was my neighbor in the village. He's sometimes funny, and I'm good-natured, so he made me laugh now and then. He followed me about because he was in love with me; and as I was used to seeing him day after day, I began to care for him too, for lack of anyone better; but I always knew he was a glutton and had no education.

FLAMINIA. An uneducated glutton! Lovely qualities in the suitor of our charming and tender Sylvia! Come now, what have you decided to do?

SYLVIA. I don't know what to say; so many yesses and noes are whirling through my head, which should I listen to? On the one side, Robin is a gadabout who thinks only of his dinner; on the other side, if I marry him, these arrogant women will crow that I've gone back to where I deserve to be. And then there's something else.

FLAMINIA Oh? What is this something else?

SYLVIA. You know....

FLAMINIA No, I don't.

SYLVIA. Of course you do. Baron Belair....

FLAMINIA. What of him?

SYLVIA. This is in strict confidence too, Flaminia, please! I don't know what's happened to me since I saw him again; but he seems so sweet, he tells me such tender things, he talks about his love so nobly, so humbly, that I'm full of pity for him, and this pity keeps me from thinking as straight as I should.

FLAMINIA. Come! Tell me the truth! Your secret is safe with me. Are you falling a little bit in love with him?

SYLVIA. I don't think so, because I'm supposed to love Robin.

FLAMINIA. He's an excellent gentleman.

SYLVIA. I know.

FLAMINIA. And no pauper!

SYLVIA. I don't care.

FLAMINIA. It occurs to me that if the prince allowed you to marry the baron and consented to look for another village girl to sire his future little Poupons, you'd still be amply avenged and justified.

SYLVIA. I've been thinking the same thing, to be honest with you; and I would do it, maybe, if Robin wanted to marry another girl. I'd have the right to tell him, "You left me, I'm leaving you, we're even." Otherwise—dear me! Life is so difficult!

FLAMINIA. Your scruples do you honor, my dear. As far as delicacy of feelings is concerned, you and Belair are a match made in heaven! I doubt whether your Robin would indulge in these refinements of conscience if opportunity came his way. Heavens! Here comes the baron again.

SYLVIA. I look like a fright! Let me fix my hair and face!

*(She runs away as Prince Poupon enters from the other side)*

PRINCE. Why are you laughing, Flaminia?

FLAMINIA. No reason, my lord, no reason. But don't take another step; Sylvia will be here in a few minutes.

PRINCE. Good. I was looking for her. Are we making any progress?

FLAMINIA. Such progress, my lord, that when she comes, and I make a coy exit, you may as well reveal yourself to her and sweep her into your arms.

PRINCE. Not quite so fast, my dear. I want to examine my darling a little longer.

FLAMINIA. Say rather that you are enjoying yourself.

PRINCE. Always so clever! Yes, I am enjoying myself. It's a new pleasure; nothing like all those balls and banquets and three-act comedies that wear me out.

FLAMINIA. Have it your way, but don't—wait; here's Princess Sylvia.

*(Enter Sylvia)*

FLAMINIA. Come in, my dear; don't be afraid. I was trying to entertain the baron without much success. As he was anxiously looking for you and not for me, allow me to withdraw. Not another word!

*(Exit Flaminia)*

PRINCE. Dearest Sylvia, I was looking for you in order to ask whether Lisa has apologized to you as commanded. But why should I lie to you? I was looking for you in order to see you again—my only happiness on earth. But if my love wearies you, if I myself displease you and stand between you and a much nobler life, order me to hold my tongue and leave. I'll suffer without complaint, resolved as I am to obey you in all things.

SYLVIA. Just listen to you! How am I ever going to send you away? If I order you to be still, you'll be still; if I order you to leave me, you'll leave me; you won't dare complain, you'll obey me in everything. A fine way you've chosen to make me give you orders!

PRINCE. Can I do better than make you the mistress of my destiny?

SYLVIA. What's the use? Could I bring myself to make you unhappy? If I told you to go away, you'd believe I hate you; if I told you to be still, you'd believe I was cold; and all these beliefs would be untrue; I'd be distressing you without making myself a bit happier.

PRINCE. Well then, beautiful Sylvia, what do you want me to do?

SYLVIA. I don't know what I want! I'm waiting for somebody to tell me; I know even less than you about it. Robin loves me; the prince courts me; you deserve me; there are women here who insult me and whom I'd like to punish; I'll be humiliated if I don't marry the prince; Robin worries me; you trouble my mind because—because. Oh, I wish I had never met you; all this turmoil in my brain is making me miserable. If only you were the prince!

PRINCE. What if I were?

SYLVIA. I'd tell Robin you were the master, and it couldn't be helped. But I'd want to use that pretext only for you.

PRINCE (*aside*). Isn't she adorable? I ought to reveal myself now.

SYLVIA. And it's not because of power and possessions that I'd want you to be the prince, but because of yourself. But it mustn't be. No. I'm glad you're not the master after all; I'd be too tempted. And even if you were, I couldn't choose to be unfaithful; I love Robin; and that's my conclusion.

PRINCE (*aside*). Let's wait a little longer. (*Aloud*) All I ask, Sylvia, is that you continue to think kindly of me. The prince is preparing an

entertainment in your honor. You are finally to meet him after the feast; and I am instructed to tell you that if you remain indifferent to him, you will be free to go home.

SYLVIA. Oh, I'll remain indifferent, and I'm as good as gone already. But once I'm home, you'll visit me again. Who knows what will happen then? No! I'll never be—do I hear steps? It could be Robin!

*(She runs away)*

PRINCE *(alone)*. Fly, my dove!.... Will marriage be as delicious as this?

### ACT THREE

*(Later the same day. Enter the prince and Flaminia)*

FLAMINIA. I agree, my lord; this delay doesn't spoil anything, but you've nearly reached your goal—and I mine.

PRINCE. Ah, Flaminia, how I thank Dr. Vascularius—or rather the planets. I started out dreaming only of renewing the Poupon line, and now I find myself in love like the most common of commoners.

FLAMINIA. Congratulations.

PRINCE. It is pleasant, of course, to have a countess or a duchess tell me distinctly that she adores me. And yet, Flaminia, this pleasure is pale and insipid compared to my joy when I listen to Sylvia's scruples and hesitations.

FLAMINIA. Dare I ask you to repeat something of what she tells you?

PRINCE. Impossible. I'm delighted, I'm bewitched; but that's all I can report.

FLAMINIA. The report is unusual but promising.

PRINCE. If you knew, says she, if you knew how wretched I am because I must not love you, because the prince wants me for himself, and because I must be faithful to Robin, and because I see you grief-stricken! One moment more, and she would have cried, "Love me, love me, take me into your arms!"

FLAMINIA. We can dispose of the prince at any rate!

PRINCE. Yes; we have him in our pocket. Which leaves us with Robin outstanding. So hurry, Flaminia, hurry. Will you conquer him soon? You know I am determined not to use force against him. What does he say?

FLAMINIA. To tell you the truth, my lord, I think I have got him head over heels in love with me, only he doesn't know it yet. By calling me his dear friend, he is living at ease with his conscience, and enjoying his love gratis; but in our next conversation, I intend to let him become acquainted with the true nature of his intimacies with me. And between his weakness for me, which will not remain incognito for long, and your own gentle words to him, we'll be putting

an end to your worries and completing my labors, from which, my lord, I will emerge victorious and defeated.

PRINCE. In what way?

FLAMINIA. Oh, it's a detail of small importance; namely that I've taken a fancy to Robin—only in order to add spice to my plot, of course.

PRINCE. And don't forget; the lad you've taken a fancy to will be Lord Robinet.

FLAMINIA. I haven't forgotten. But let's leave this room, my lord. Go find Sylvia. Here's Robin, and he mustn't see either one of us yet.

*(Exeunt Flaminia and the prince. Enter Trivet and Robin, the latter looking gloomy)*

TRIVET. Well, what am I supposed to do with this writing-desk and paper?

ROBIN. Silence, underling; give me time to think.

TRIVET. As much as you wish.

ROBIN. Tell me, who provides my board in this place?

TRIVET. The prince does, as you well know.

ROBIN. Deuce take it! All this good food is beginning to worry me.

TRIVET. Why?

ROBIN. I'm afraid of being charged without my knowing it. What are you laughing at, you oaf?

TRIVET. I'm laughing at your funny notions. Go on, Sir Robin, eat and drink without fear.

ROBIN. I'm enjoying my meals in good faith, and I'm hanged if I want to be handed a bill when I go; but I'll take your word for it. Tell me, though, what's the title of the man in charge of the prince's official business?

TRIVET. You mean his secretary of state?

ROBIN. That's right; I want to send him a letter. I'll ask him to notificcate the prince that I'm collecting dust here and that I want matters settled once and for all, as my father is at home all by hisself and needs help in the stable.

TRIVET. And then?

ROBIN. And after that, me and Sylvia must hear the wedding bells. Go on, start writing. Begin with "Sir".

TRIVET. Stop! The correct form is "My lord".

ROBIN. Put both and let him choose.

TRIVET. If you say so.

ROBIN. "This is to inform you that my name is Robin."

TRIVET. Gently! The formula is, "This is to inform your Grace".

ROBIN. Your Grace, your Grace! Is this secretary of state a dancer?

TRIVET. No, but it's required anyway.

ROBIN. Damn this gibberish! Since when is it the custom to talk about the shape of a fellow you're doin' business with?

TRIVET. Anything you say. I'm writing. "This is to inform you that my name is Robin." What next?

ROBIN. "And that I am courting a girl whose name is Sylvia, and who is a respectable girl from my village." Have you got that?

TRIVET. Yes, sir.

ROBIN. "And also that I have recently made friends with a girl that's called Flaminia who can't live without us, nor us without her; wherefore, upon receipt of same—"

TRIVET (*stopping as though grief-stricken*). Flaminia can't live without you? Ay, the pen drops from my hand.

ROBIN. And what's this insolent swooning all about?

TRIVET. For two years, Sir Robin, I've sighed in secret for Flaminia.

ROBIN (*producing his stick*). I don't think a corpse does any sighing.

TRIVET. Wait! Put that stick away! Suppose I'm in love with Flaminia? What's that to you? You like her, that's all, and when you like somebody you don't feel jealous.

ROBIN. You're mistaken; my liking doesn't like trespassers. (*Beats him*)

TRIVET. Damn your liking!

(*He runs away. Enter Flaminia*)

FLAMINIA. What's going on? What's the matter, Robin?

ROBIN. The rascal was telling me that he's in love with you.

FLAMINIA. I know he is. Don't you see—that's why he wants to report my friendship for you to the prince. He's hoping that I'll be



disgraced, so he can take my hand, slip a ring on my finger, and call himself my savior.

ROBIN. And you, my dear, what do you say?

FLAMINIA. What can I say? And to whom can I turn if I am disgraced?

ROBIN. To me, d'you hear? And I don't want to share our friendship with nobody, and least with that no-good Trivet.

FLAMINIA (*gently*). Robin, do you realize that you're quite ruthless with my heart?

ROBIN. Me? What harm am I doing?

FLAMINIA. If you don't stop speaking to me the way you do, soon I won't be able to tell what kind of feeling I have for you. The truth is, I'm afraid to examine myself on this matter. I might find more than I wish.

ROBIN. Well then, don't never examine, Flaminia. Just let things be. And don't look for a man. I have a girl and I'm keepin' her; but if I didn't have one, I wouldn't go lookin'. What would I do with a girl as long as you were about? She'd be in my way.

FLAMINIA. She'd be in your way! After that, how can I be a mere friend to you?

ROBIN. Well, what else do you want to be?

FLAMINIA (*softly*). Not second to Sylvia....

ROBIN (*uneasy*). Side by side?

FLAMINIA. Hush. I'll send her to you if I find her. Will that make you happy?

ROBIN. Don't go yet, don't send nobody, don't go!

FLAMINIA. I must, dear Robin. The prince's personal secretary has asked for me, and though I tremble, I must see what he wants. Good-bye, Robin, I'll be back soon.

*(Exit Flaminia. Enter the prince)*

ROBIN. Who the devil is coming now? Ha, it's that baron. I've been meaning to look for you, sir. I didn't like the way you leered and moped and grumbled when you saw me and my woman together at Mrs. Grissini's party. Once I become Count Robinet, I might just exchange this stick for a sword and run you through the windpipe, by crickety-crack.

PRINCE. Calm down, my good man. The prince has ordered me to talk to you.

ROBIN. You're free to talk, but nobody ordered me to listen.

PRINCE. I see that in order to curb you I must tell you the truth at last. Know then that I am not Baron Belair, as both you and Sylvia believe; I am the Prince himself.

ROBIN. No foolin'?

*(Enter Trivet holding up a large painting of the prince on horseback)*

PRINCE. Read what it says, my lad.

ROBIN. I can't read, but it's a picture of you, and no mistake. Nice horse, too.

PRINCE. It says, Prince Poupon the Seventeenth. Do you believe me now?

*(He strikes the same pose as in the picture)*

ROBIN. I do, I do. *(He falls on his knees)* My lord, forgive me for blathering like a muck-headed fool.

PRINCE. Gladly, my boy. Stand up! I forgive you with all my heart, provided you don't reveal to anyone what I have told you.

*(Trivet trips off with the painting)*

ROBIN. I promise to keep my mouth shut. But since you bear me no grudge, my lord, won't you take care that I bear none against you? I ain't strong enough to stand up to a prince, but you should pity me, bein' so powerful, because I know you don't want to rule over the land like a tyrant.

PRINCE. I am too soft, too weak, and you all take advantage of that.

ROBIN. How can I answer you, my lord? I have only one girl to love me, but you, your house is full of high-born ladies, and yet you take my one and only girl away from me. Suppose I was a poor man, and that all my property amounted to a penny. Then suppose you come along, worth a silver mine; you fling yourself on my poverty and you

tear the penny out of my hand. Isn't that a sorry thing to do?

PRINCE (*aside*). He is right, and I am touched by his grief.

ROBIN. I know you're a kind-hearted prince, everybody says so; I'm the only one who won't be able to agree with them.

PRINCE (*aside*). How can I answer him?

ROBIN. Come, my lord, ask yourself: "Shall I harm this simple fellow because I have the power to do so? Isn't it up to me, his master, to protect him? Shall I be unjust to him now and repent of it later? Who will fill the office of prince if I don't? No, I shall order Sylvia to be restored to him."

PRINCE. Always the same idea! Remember that I am your monarch and could make you and Sylvia tremble. Instead, though our country needs her, though you are obstinate, and though you have shown me scant respect, I take an interest in your grief and try to alleviate it. Indeed, I want to ennoble you, grant you estates out of my own possessions, and give you Flaminia for your wife. But still you resist like a stubborn peasant.

ROBIN. Oh, life is so difficult!

PRINCE. However, I confess that I have been unjust to you. Let Pouponaco suffer. Sylvia belongs to you. Go back to your village with her. And since Trivet has asked me a thousand times for permission to marry Flaminia, I will finally give my consent and let them be man and wife. Good-bye, Robin. I shall order a cart to take you back to your farm.

ROBIN (*choking*). Wait, wait.

*(But the prince has left)*

ROBIN. Flaminia and Trivet! Did I hear what I heard? This is an emergency. I'd better find her right away. But what am I going to tell her? That I'll twist Trivet's neck? And that I'll give up Sylvia? Is that possible? Am I the Robin I used to know? No, Robin is my name but I've turned into somebody else.

*(Enter Flaminia, looking unhappy. Long, tragic silence)*

ROBIN. Talk to me....

FLAMINIA. Adieu, Robin.

ROBIN. What do you mean—adieu?

FLAMINIA. The prince is ordering me either to marry Trivet or else to take perpetual vows as a Sister of Chastity on the island of Saint Barrabas. And I'm past caring which of the two horrors I'll pick, because as in a bolt from heaven it was revealed to me that I'm being rightly punished.

ROBIN. For what?

FLAMINIA. For not concealing that what I felt for you wasn't friendship.

ROBIN. What was it?

FLAMINIA. You name it. I can't.

ROBIN... Love?

FLAMINIA. Oh don't say another word, Robin, let me fly to my destiny.

*(She takes a couple of steps)*

ROBIN. Stay! Don't leave me!

FLAMINIA. Let me go; I have said too much.

ROBIN. Stop! Because that bolt from heaven just hit me too. I love you! There, that settles it, and I don't know what I'm saying. Uff!

FLAMINIA. Are you sure, Robin? Or are you lying to me?

ROBIN. Sure I'm sure!

FLAMINIA. What a predicament!

ROBIN. I'm not married, fortunately.

FLAMINIA. That's true.

ROBIN. Sylvia will do her duty to Pouponaco and marry the prince, as is right and proper.

FLAMINIA. And a blessing to our dear country.

ROBIN. After which, since we miscalculated and love each other by mistake, we'll reach an understanding and somehow make the best of it.

FLAMINIA *(softly)*. Do you mean that you will visit me in my convent?

ROBIN. No, by crickety-crack, because you'll be my wife in my bed.

*(He swoops on Flaminia and embraces her)*

FLAMINIA. Count Robinet! What are you doing to me?

ROBIN. What about you? Why didn't you warn me from the start that you was going to turn my head?

FLAMINIA. And you—did you send out a warning that you would captivate me? Kiss me again.

*(They kiss)*

ROBIN. Uff! You ladies sure know what's what! But hadn't I ought to talk to the prince afore he hands you over to that rascal Trivet? Give me courage to do it, my pigeon. *(They kiss again)* Who would've thought this would taste so good? I don't know whether I'm comin' or goin'.

FLAMINIA. Go to the prince, my darling. I'm sure you'll find him accomodating.

ROBIN. All right; but you—don't tell Sylvia that I love you. She'll think I'm guilty of somethin', when it's plain as sunshine that I'm innocent. After all, ain't I giving her up because when the good of 'umanity is at stake, a boy shouldn't be selfish?

FLAMINIA. A noble thought, my lord. But now go, go!

*(Exit Robin)*

FLAMINIA *(looking up)*. Papa! *(Changing her mind, she looks down)*. Papa! Forgive me for marrying beneath my rank, as I forgive you for preferring the gambling table to your family. Besides, wherever you may be now, a duke in either place *(imitating Robin)* ain't no better nor a farmhand. *(She laughs in high good humor)*. Lo and behold, here's the other one.

*(Enter Sylvia)*

FLAMINIA. What are you dreaming about, fair Sylvia?

SYLVIA. About something I don't understand, namely myself.

FLAMINIA. What's so incomprehensible about yourself?

SYLVIA. Do you remember how I wanted to be avenged on that Lisa girl and the other envious women? Well, that's all over.

FLAMINIA. You're not vindictive, you see.

SYLVIA. And I loved Robin, didn't I?

FLAMINIA. So I vaguely remember.

SYLVIA. I think I don't any more.

FLAMINIA. That's no calamity.

SYLVIA. And if it were a calamity, what could I do about it? When love came along, I loved him; now that it's going away, I *don't* love him. Love came without my bidding, and it leaves in its own good time; I don't believe that I'm to blame.

FLAMINIA (*aside*). I'll needle her a bit. (*Aloud*) When we look into ourselves, we rarely find anything to blame.

SYLVIA. What kind of insinuation is that? I order you to agree with me without afterthought. Really! The women they send after me in order to nag the life out of me!

FLAMINIA. Don't lose your temper; I was only joking, Sylvia. I truly believe you're not to blame in the least. But who is it you're in love with? Is it Baron Belair or the prince?

SYLVIA. How can you ask? You're joking again, when I'm in torment. The prince is determined to revive the Poupons by marrying me. What will he say when instead of refusing him for Robin, I reject him for one of his own vassals? If he is even a tiny bit of a tyrant, he'll throw me into a dungeon instead of sending me back to my sheep and cows.

FLAMINIA. This is worrisome, I admit. But I'll let you in on a secret.

SYLVIA. What is it?

FLAMINIA. Dr. Vascularius took me aside an hour ago and whispered that a tremendous revelation is at hand for you.

SYLVIA. What sort of revelation? Revelations can be good or bad.

FLAMINIA. He wouldn't tell me. But by his wink and his grin I gathered it will be a gratifying one.

SYLVIA. I don't know. Maybe it will be revealed that I've behaved like a slut toward Robin. How can I help fretting myself about him? Will I be making him very miserable? What's your opinion? But don't go putting a lot of scruples into my head.

FLAMINIA. Don't worry about Robin; he'll be easy to console.

SYLVIA. Thank you! Thank you very much! To listen to you, it doesn't take much to forget me. Don't tell me he's found someone else in the palace!

FLAMINIA. Nonsense. I don't know what I was saying. Forget you? You'll be lucky if he doesn't go mad with despair.

SYLVIA. Now why did you say *that* to me? You and your mad with despair! You've made me hesitate again.

FLAMINIA. What if he no longer loved you. What would you say?

SYLVIA. I'd say ... that you should keep the news to yourself.

FLAMINIA. But you're annoyed because he does love you! What do you really want?

SYLVIA. You can laugh, but I'd like to see you in my place.

FLAMINIA. Here's your admirer. Take my advice—settle with him, don't worry about dungeons, and remember what I said about the revelation.

*(Exit Flaminia. Enter the prince)*

PRINCE. Sylvia—won't you look at me? Your face becomes overcast every time I come near you. And yet I had the temerity, a while ago, to hope—

SYLVIA. Continue.

PRINCE. That you could love me.

SYLVIA (*sadly*). How can I allow myself to love you, when on the one side stands Robin and on the other the prince?

PRINCE. What if I could sway the prince? We are blood-relations, and I have some influence over him.

SYLVIA. And Robin? Tell me, you who are a man of principle: you know how I stand with Robin. Suppose I felt like being in love with you. Suppose I gave way to my feelings. Would I be acting right? or wrong? There now, give me your disinterested advice.

PRINCE. Consider this. A man is riding a horse westward at a modest canter. Lightning strikes in front of him. The horse takes off eastward at a wild gallop. Is the rider to blame? Of course not. And so it goes for us lovers. Passion races us whither it will, and only the devil would be mean enough to blame us for being carried away by it. Such, adorable Sylvia, is my verdict, and King Solomon couldn't do better.

SYLVIA. I bow to your wisdom, and will love you as much as I like. But now another scruple gnaws at my spirit.

PRINCE. My dearest girl has as many scruples as the rose has petals. Tell me what this one is, and promise me it will be the last.

SYLVIA. I promise. What if people accuse me of being a fortune-hunter?

PRINCE. They cannot make that accusation.

SYLVIA. Why not?

PRINCE. Because, if you had been a fortune-hunter, you would have chosen the prince rather than one of his subjects.

SYLVIA. You are wise, my lord. But perhaps I failed to choose him because he never showed himself to me.

PRINCE. Now I tremble again. What if he suddenly appeared? Appeared and dazzled you?

SYLVIA. I'll make you so happy you'll never have to tremble again. Step back, my lord, and hear my solemn oath, which is (*she raises her hand*) that to my dying day I shall never love the—

PRINCE. Stop, Sylvia, stop, stop, stop! Don't complete your oath!

SYLVIA. Strange man! Why not?

PRINCE. Shall I let you swear against myself?

SYLVIA. Against yourself? Baron Belair, what do you mean?

*(Trivet trips in with the painting again)*

PRINCE. Do you recognize Poupon the Seventeenth?

SYLVIA. The revelation!

*(She kneels. Exit Trivet)*

PRINCE. Rise, Sylvia; rise, fair promise of Pouponaco. I concealed my rank up to this moment, so that I might come to know the real person you are, and owe your love only to my own.

SYLVIA. Oh, my prince, what an oath I was about to take! But now you are sure that I loved you for yourself, without mean ambition, and my happiness is that you know I am speaking the truth.

PRINCE. These words seal our marriage.



*(He kisses her. Enter Robin and Flaminia)*

ROBIN. I overheard you, Sylvia.

SYLVIA. Well then, I won't have to tell you what happened. The prince—yes, this is our prince—he will talk to you, because I am too troubled. Please come to an understanding. Explanations are beyond me. What would you tell me? That I've left you. What would I answer? That it's true. Let's pretend that you've said it and that I've answered, and then—console yourself as best you can.

PRINCE. Calm yourself, beloved. Flaminia, I place Count Robinet in your hands. Count, take Flaminia, marry her, and enjoy the good will of your prince forever. Yes, dearest Sylvia, that is how our whirling hearts and our uncertain destinies have finally come to rest.

ROBIN *(to Sylvia)*. Shall we shake hands and be friends, you snake?

SYLVIA. Let's be friends and shake hands, you serpent.

*(They shake hands, look at each other, and run away in opposite directions)*

PRINCE. Flaminia, look on your prince as your eternally grateful benefactor.

*(Flaminia kneels and kisses the prince's hand)*

FLAMINIA. It pleases me no end that my little...arrangements succeeded all around. *(She rises)* Go, my lord, go find your princess. and I my spouse.

*(Exeunt separately the prince and Flaminia. The stage is empty. Enter Lisa)*

LISA. Is this this any way of ending a comedy? Succeeded all around the devil! What about me? I'm the prettiest girl in Pouponaco, bar none, if you know what I mean, and yet I have nothing whatever to show for it. My clever sister is flying so high, of course, that she forgets her poor—

*(Reenter Flaminia)*

FLAMINIA. Lisa dear!

LISA. Yes, sister.

FLAMINIA. Come here.

LISA. Yes, sister.

FLAMINIA. You look a little pinched. But I have an idea. Shall I marry you to Trivet?

LISA. To Trivet? How dare you!

FLAMINIA. Not so loud. Poupon is about to surprise him. In reward for his services, Trivet will be named tomorrow Lord Chamberlain of the realm, with an income of twenty thousand ducats. Good-bye, Lisa; my big man is waiting for me.

*(Exit Flaminia)*

LISA. Hm.

*(Enter Trivet, wailing)*

TRIVET. Ay, ay, ay!

LISA. Trivet! What's the matter with you?

TRIVET. The matter with me is that I'm destined to stand at the precise spot where blows are handed out.

LISA. Poor boy, let me rub your shoulder. Tell your Lisa what happened.

TRIVET. I ran into Dr. Vascularius, armed with his cane and spitting mad because I impersonated him. Feel the bump on my head. Ooooy!

LISA. Poor Trivet. I'll kiss it away. There. Come with me, I have something magical in my room that will heal you.

TRIVET. Have you? Ooyooyooo!

LISA. What now?

TRIVET. It hurts all over. Oh, I'll need large helpings of that magic!

*(Exeunt)*

**THE END**

# A CHECKLIST OF PUBLISHED PLAYS BY OSCAR MANDEL

(1961-2002)

1. Island. *Massachusetts Review*, Winter 1961.
2. The Monk Who Wouldn't. *First Stage*, Summer 1962.
3. The Cage Opened, and Out Flew a Coward. *Minnesota Review*, Spring 1964.
4. The Fatal French Dentist. *First Stage*, Summer 1965.
5. Honest Urubamba. *The Literary Review*, Autumn 1965.
6. Professor Snaffle's Polypon. *First Stage*, Summer 1965.
7. *The Fatal French Dentist*. New York: Samuel French, 1965.
8. The Virgin and the Unicorn. *Minnesota Review*, VII/1, 1967.
9. General Audax. *First Stage*, Fall 1967.
10. Living Room With 6 Oppression. *Drama & Theatre*, Spring 1970.
11. *Collected Plays*, Volume I. Santa Barbara: Unicorn Press, 1970.
  - 11/1. General Audax.
  - 11/2. Honest Urubamba.
  - 11/3. Living Room With 6 Oppressions.
  - 11/4. A Splitting Headache, Conceived During the Memorable War Between Istria and Friuli.
  - 11/5. The Virgin and the Unicorn.
  - 11/6. Island.
12. *Collected Plays*, Volume II. Santa Barbara: Unicorn Press, 1972.
  - 12/1. The Monk Who Wouldn't.
  - 12/2. The Fatal French Dentist.
  - 12/3. Professor Snaffle's Polypon.
  - 12/4. The Sensible Man of Jerusalem.
  - 12/5. Adam Adamson [formerly: The Cage Opened, and Out Flew a Coward].
  - 12/6. Of Angels and Eskimos.
13. Water From an Italian Pump. *Mediterranean Review*, Winter 1972.
14. Living-Room With 6 Oppressions. In *The Scene/2: Plays from Off-Off Broadway*, ed. Stanley Nelson. New York: The Smith/New Egypt, 1974.
15. The Patriots of Nantucket. Los Angeles: Spectrum Productions/Books, 1976.
16. *Amphitryon*. Los Angeles: Spectrum Productions/Books, 1976.
17. The Summoning of Philoctetes [formerly: Island]. In *Philoctetes and the Fall of Troy*, ed. Oscar Mandel. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981.

18. And the Lord God Planted a Garden. *Kenyon Review*, Spring 1985.
19. *The Kukkurik Fables*. Los Angeles: Spectrum Productions/Books, 1987.
20. *Sigismund, Prince of Poland*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988.
21. *The Virgin and the Unicorn: Four Plays by Oscar Mandel*. Los Angeles: Spectrum Productions/Books, 1993.
  - 21/1. The Virgin and the Unicorn.
  - 21/2. Water From an Italian Pump.
  - 21/3. And the Lord God Planted a Garden.
  - 21/4. A Beautiful Investment.
22. The Rebels of Nantucket [formerly: The Patriots of Nantucket]. In *Two Romantic Plays: The Spaniards in Denmark by Prosper Mérimée and The Rebels of Nantucket by Oscar Mandel*. Los Angeles: Spectrum Productions/Books, 1996.
23. *L'Arc de Philoctète*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002.
24. *Reinventions: Four Plays by Oscar Mandel, after Homer, Cervantes, Calderón and Marivaux*. Los Angeles: Spectrum Productions/Books, 2002.
  - 24/1. Sigismund, Prince of Poland.
  - 24/2. The Fall of Numantia [formerly: General Audax].
  - 24/3. Agamemnon Triumphant.
  - 24/4. Prince Poupon Needs a Wife.

*Note.* Translations are not included in this list. Later versions of any given play always carry more or less substantial revisions.

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